

THE
ATELIER
DU LYS

OR

AN ART STUDENT IN THE REIGN OF TERROR

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MADEMOISELLE MORI"



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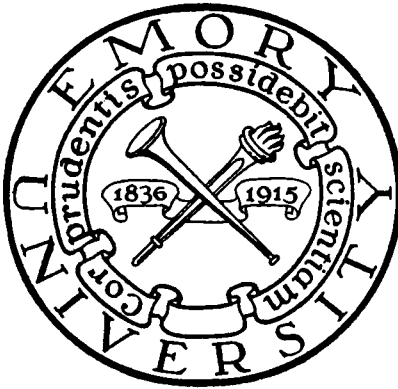
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AN

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Ballantyne Press

**BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
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BY *THE*

AUTHOR OF 'MADEMOISELLE MORI

‘Our duty is neither to ridicule the affairs of men, nor to deplore, but simply to understand them’—SPINOZA

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DEDICATED
TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF
E. M. H.

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THE ATELIER DU LYS.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

BETWEEN Pontarlier on the French frontier and that district which in 1793 was known as Bresse lies a great stretch of as uninteresting country as can be found in the whole of Central France. It is sparsely populated now, and was even more so then; but here and there a village raises its red-tiled roofs beside a winding river, and then the long white road goes on again over a featureless plain, as far as eye can see, without another hamlet coming into sight. Vaise is one of these villages, far off the modern track of travellers, and offering nothing noticeable in itself, but situated in one of the few spots which have any claim to picturesqueness, for there a little river runs fiercely between rocky banks, eddying and foaming round great blocks of stone which fell into it at that far-off time when this strange and sudden upheaval of the ground took place, and obliging anyone who wishes to cross to go all the way round to the bridge, which spans the stream with a single very high and pointed stone arch. At first sight the bed seems so narrow and so much encumbered by the huge boulders lying in it that, except at times when melting snow or heavy rains send the stream in flood to the Saône, it looks an easy thing to cross upon them; but the inhabitants know that in mid-channel there is always a deep and rapid current, too wide to jump across, and strong enough to sweep away any stepping-stones. They either go round to the bridge, or borrow the miller's boat. The mill stands by a wider and quieter bit of water, formed partly by

Nature, partly by art. Every mill has its boat along these streams. In 1792 the mill of Vaise belonged to the Château de St. Aignan, and until feudal rights were abolished the villagers were bound to have their corn ground at it. The château stood on the other side of the river, an ancient, but not very extensive building. Its owners were of a good country family—*noblesse de province*—who, until the last twenty years, had lived on their estates, and only claimed very distant cousinship with the elder branch of the same name. The actual owner had joined the army as a lad of twelve, with some half-dozen young cousins, under his father's guardianship, and before he was thirteen had seen some service, and came home for a short time to be cured of a wound in the arm. Since then he had rarely appeared, except to pass a few weeks in hunting, and his intendant, or steward, Leroux, was much better known to the tenants than their master, of whom Leroux's dealings gave no very pleasant impression. Living at Court strained the resources of a property never very considerable, and, as elsewhere, the tenants of St. Aignan were ground down by exactions—not more than elsewhere, and not less. Things were rapidly changing now, but for the moment it seemed doubtful whether for the better or worse. The Baron and his sons were gone, indeed, out of the story; some said they were in Paris, others that they had emigrated; no one knew or cared much which was true; Leroux only shrugged his shoulders when asked. He had always given it to be understood that he was the unwilling instrument of his master's exactions, and that his strongest wish was never to see or hear of him again. This was true enough, though perhaps not in the sense in which he wished it to be understood. The villagers had never known exactly what to make of Jacques Leroux; they had feared him when he acted for his lord, and feared him even more now that he headed the little party of Jacobins which had sprung up at Vaise as elsewhere, to be at first hailed and admired as patriots by their neighbours, all of whom had their own story of wrongs and sufferings, but who now began to be viewed with vague and fearful distrust. No one in France knew exactly what to expect or fear, so that no effectual defence could be attempted against the rising tide of revolution. Of late a rumour had circulated that the château and its lands were to be sold as *bien d'émigré*, in lots to the

highest bidder, as the property of a neighbouring convent had been some time before. No one knew the truth of this, unless Leroux did. The villagers thought that they must now be at liberty to kill game and fell trees as they pleased, and went, *en masse*, to pull down the dovecot of the château, with vengeful recollections of the crops destroyed and diminished by the flights of pigeons, whose right it was to feed in the tenants' fields. But having accomplished the destruction of the 'colombier,' they found a sudden check put to their proceedings by Leroux's declaring that the château and its dependencies were the property of the nation, and must therefore be respected. It was a severe disappointment, and there was much grumbling, but with bated breath, for Leroux knew how to speak too significantly to be disregarded. No one liked to meet his light-grey eyes twice. He was an under-sized man, with a narrow head and a thin voice; there seemed nothing formidable about him, and yet everyone felt something of that mortal terror in which his wife held him—terror which was not produced by blows or any tangible ill-treatment. Leroux had never struck a blow, nor abused anyone loudly in his life; but he had a singular power of cowing all under his authority by look and tone, and a few quiet words. By such means he had long since crushed his wife into helpless, nervous submission. Madame Leroux did not belong to Vaise by birth. She came from Berri, where the St. Aignans had also property; and the good folks of Vaise had always looked on her as a stranger, and therefore more foe than friend. During all the seventeen years in which she had lived in Vaise, and faded into a pale, shrinking creature, the shadow of her old self, she had not known how to make a friend among her own class; and the only person who showed her a little rough kindness was the miller, a good-humoured cheery man, who had married Leroux's sister. There was, no doubt, a jealousy of her, as being not only a foreigner, but a step above them as the intendant's wife, and often at the château; but the deeper reason was that she grew yearly more spiritless and unable to show friendliness herself. Her one desire was to keep out of sight, and come as little as possible in Leroux's way. Only one person had succeeded in winning the confidence of the frightened woman, and this was Madame de St. Aignan, a Berrichonne like herself, who, when she was at the château, would send for

her and recall mutual recollections of her native place, while they played with little Edmée, until she outgrew her babyhood, and went to the château to learn instead of to play. Edmée was the only child of Madame Leroux, and the god-child of Madame de St. Aignan. But the kind mistress of the château was dead, taken away from the evil to come, and Madame Leroux was slowly pining to death on a sick bed, nursed by Edmée, now a slender, startled-looking girl of sixteen, who feared Leroux as much as her mother did, but in a different way. Madame Leroux knew more of her husband's tactics than anyone else did; he had used her as a tool, and she had been conscious of it, without indeed daring to resist; but the thought that she had been a spy on the St. Aignans had gone far to break down what little courage she had left, and bring her to her grave. She fancied, with a weak woman's exaggerated remorse, that the ruin of the family to whom she owed hereditary allegiance, and who were represented to her by the beloved lady to whom she was indebted for all the faint rays of sunshine which her married life had known, lay at her door. The thought haunted her day and night, haunted Edmée too, though she, at least, was blameless; for when she discovered that her father had a purpose in making her repeat everything which she heard at the château (and much was said before the child by guests and relations full of peril in these last years) she renounced those visits which were her one joy, as far as possible, or let nothing be extracted from her on her return, let Leroux do what he would, though she had to set her teeth and clench her hands to keep back the passionate words that rushed to her lips when he turned on Madame Leroux, and reproached her for Edmée's uselessness to him, with the scathing speeches of which he was master. There were times when he hated this girl—who stood white, mute, in passive resistance, her dark eyes glowing, though she dared not lift them—almost more than he did the poor feeble woman who crouched at his voice and step in unconcealed terror. There were many miserable families in Vaise; want and wretchedness made men hard; the tailor behind his little window with its leaded panes, and the weaver throwing his shuttle for ill-paid work, nay, the mothers themselves were often tempted to wish the swarms of half-naked children scrambling about the doorsteps were underground; but there was scarcely one household half as miserable as that of the prosperous Jacques Leroux.

‘If I only knew where they all are now!’ his wife was murmuring to Edmée, in weak, wandering tones, as the spring twilight gathered and all the landscape grew indistinct. Edmée bent over her, put the pillow straight, and thought anxiously that the worn face looked more drawn since morning, and that the voice was fainter. It was lowered, however, as much from instinctive fear and caution as weakness, although there was no one in the house but the mother and daughter, for Leroux was at a meeting, held to deliberate on the last measures of the Convention. ‘If I only knew where they are now, M. le Baron and his sons—Mademoiselle—how our dear lady loved her! born sisters could not have been more to each other; they were brought up in the convent together, our lady and Mademoiselle. Ah, Edmée, dost thou recollect the night I fell down the stairs?—she heard of it and came at once, leaving her guests, only a mantle thrown round her, in her beautiful dress, and wetted the bandages on my head and spoke such kind words. I would have suffered twice as much again gladly, only to hear them.’

‘I remember well, mother,’ answered the girl, on whom the unexpected visit from the lovely lady of the château, in her rich evening dress and sparkling diamonds, had made an ineffaceable impression.

‘And she comforted thee, child, and kissed thee before she went; thy father was standing by and I saw him look at her—ah, how he looked at her and the diamonds!’ murmured Madame Leroux, shuddering; ‘she never guessed that I was a spy on her and all of them, and must learn where the jewels and papers were kept; she would not have believed it if I had knelt down and told her, as I longed to do—oh, I did long to do it! I went as seldom as I could, thou know’st that, Edmée, though *he* was angry, but sometimes I dared not disobey. I used to wish that thou would’st do as he desired, because thou know’st how it was when thou didst refuse, but afterwards, I was always glad thou hadst such courage; and she would ask why we came not?—Holy Virgin, forgive that I lied to her; how could I tell the truth? It was not my fault, Edmée,’ she added appealingly, unconscious of the deep and terrible resentment against Leroux, which welled up in Edmée’s heart at the piteous look and tone. ‘I owed her so much; I could bear my life while she lived. Do you think she was happy? she

seemed so, but M. le Baron was not the husband for her—twice her age, and not like his ancestors. All the St. Aignans before him lived here, but he must always be at Court. It is a pity that M. le Chevalier is not the eldest son; he loved this place, and so did she. He is like her—M. le Chevalier. How she loved him! he was her own, you see; the eldest son was M. le Baron's, he must always be with his father, and marry and keep up the family; but M. Alain belonged to his mother.'

'M. le Chevalier is not married, ma mère?'

'M. le Chevalier!' answered Madame Leroux, so much startled by this unheard-of idea as to speak with some energy, and half-lifting herself from her pillow. 'Chevaliers do not marry, child; what would become of a noble family if any but the eldest married? Would you have the lands divided? M. le Baron had four sisters: one married, one took the veil, one became a chanoinesse; his younger brother, M. le Chevalier de St. Aignan, uncle to our Chevalier, died young, but none ever married except the eldest son and daughter.'

'I have seen his fourth sister here, mother—Mademoiselle—you spoke of her just now. She was not a nun nor a chanoinesse,' said Edmée, in a perplexed and wondering tone, and in fact the existence of a noble unmarried woman who was neither a canoness nor a member of some religious order was an anomaly which might well surprise her.

'A relation left her a large dowry, and she was betrothed to a noble gentleman, but he was taken prisoner in the wars,' answered Madame Leroux, who was perfectly conversant with the history of the St. Aignan family; 'her family knew not whether he was alive or dead, and held it dishonourable to break their promise until it was cleared up, and so the time went by. Her father died, and she refused to enter a convent, as her family wished; her mother held it a great disgrace to have her living at home unmarried, like a bourgeoisie; but our dear lady loved her and stood by her—she always held out a hand to those who wanted help. Ah, child, I shall be out of the world soon, and have no chance of confessing first, for all the priests are driven away or in prison; it kills me when I think I cannot confess, but if ever you have a chance of doing anything for a St. Aignan, be you sure to do it, maybe it will be counted to me—you will remember, Edmée?'

‘I would do it without that, for *marraine’s* sake,’ answered the girl, using the fond name which Madame de St. Aignan had liked her to give her.

‘Yes, yes, but let it be for my sake, it may help me in purgatory if you do them a good work for me,’ urged the mother faintly.

‘I will do it, mother, no matter what it cost,’ answered the girl’s low unfaltering voice.

‘That is my own dear child,’ answered Madame Leroux, thinking too much of the comfort which the promise afforded her, to realise the risk which Edmée must run in fulfilling it. ‘Thou wert ever a good child to me.—Ah ! he is coming !’ She shrank down into the bed, trembling, as she heard the house-door open and her husband’s step enter. If she hoped that he would not take the trouble to come into her room she was mistaken ; he walked in, and stood looking at her. Something in her face struck him, for he said curtly : ‘So you are worse to-night ?’

‘No, no,’ she murmured, as if accused of a crime.

‘Bah ! you never had sense enough to know when it was of any use to lie,’ he said, surveying her with contempt. ‘Well, I have some news for you ; one of your friends—your dear lord’s eldest son—has been taken by our soldiers, fighting with Condé’s army.’ He waited for an exclamation or question, but only a faint moan answered him.

‘And he has been shot,’ Edmée said, so quietly that he was deceived into thinking she had heard the intelligence, and demanded, with angry suspicion, who had told her.

‘It needs no one to tell that, if he was taken,’ said the girl coldly.

‘Ah, well, that is true. So there is one aristocrat less in the world. Your mother would like to know that ; she was always a good patriot, and she has brought up her daughter to think like her,’ said Leroux. ‘That is why my good friend Letumier asks you in marriage, my girl.’

He had moved them both now. The mother absolutely turned towards him with a faint cry. Edmée lifted her eyes for an instant, while her face was blanched with dismay. Leroux was satisfied with the effect his information had produced, and left the room smiling to himself. To give his daughter to a red-hot Jacobin like this Letumier was in itself a proof of patriotism very valuable to him ; and to get

rid of the pale, silent girl, whom he felt he could crush but not subdue, he would have given her to Letumier or anyone else. Mother and daughter remained silent for a long time, as if Leroux had still been present. At last Madame Leroux whispered: 'My child, my poor child! If thou wert to beg thy uncle to help thee, he has always been fond of thee; it may be he would speak to thy father. Ah, if they take thee from me!'

'They shall not do that, mother.'

'But if it is his will, child!'

Edmée had no answer to make, but she never was called on to solve the question as to what she should do if her father tried to force her from her mother's sick bed. That double shock of ill-tidings extinguished the feeble flame of life in the weak frame, and by the next day's end Edmée was motherless.

Had Leroux's opinions been otherwise than what they were, no religious service could have been performed over the dead woman. At the beginning of the year 1792 law mass had still, in some places, been tolerated, early and in some secrecy, even by priests who were non-jurors, or, in other words, who had refused the oath of unconditional submission to the Government. Naturally, all who were opposed to the Revolution frequented these services, which therefore speedily became odious to the people, and it grew highly dangerous to be present at them. The priests had been hated as obstructing reform, and sharing in the innumerable privileges of the nobles; and although the country clergy had for a time been on the popular side, and fraternised with the early reforms, the oath of obedience was a stumbling-block which few could pass. More and more fled out of the country; by the end of the preceding year there were nearly 8,000 priests and nuns in England alone, homeless and penniless, and those who remained did so under an unspoken sentence of death. Marriage, as a religious rite, baptism, and burial ceased to be possible; and if anything could have added to Edmée's horror at the thought of being given to Letumier, it was that no ceremony was practicable, except that brief legal form which to her was no marriage at all. The villagers who came to see Madame Leroux buried were astonished at the tearless gaze with which Edmée looked on. They could not tell with what bitter relief she

was saying to herself: 'No one can reach her there to torture her, not even *he*!' There was almost triumph in her heart as she thought that this victim had escaped Leroux. Of her own fate she had not thought much yet, and he was too busy to concern himself just then about her. She was sure to be at hand when he wanted her. Edmée had not appealed to her uncle or to anyone else. She would have smiled hopelessly enough at the suggestion that anyone could influence Leroux. Edmée knew him too well to suppose that possible.

CHAPTER II.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

Two days after the hasty, unhonoured burial of Madame Leroux, Edmée sat alone in the dim room where she had nursed her mother, beside the empty bed. Her household duties had all been done early in the day; she had not been out of the house, nor had anyone come near her, and as she sat in silence and solitude a sudden sense of desolation came upon her, and, for the first time, hiding her face on the bed, she broke into weeping, mute, but shaking her from head to foot with emotion. Two or three figures passing the closed window, and the click of the lifted door-latch in the outer room startled her sobs away; she sat up, putting back her loosened hair, and drying her eyes in great haste, and then she flushed red, while her slender brows contracted, for, among the voices now speaking behind the thin partition which divided her room from the outer one, she recognised that of Letumier. She expected to be summoned by her father every moment, never doubting that this visit concerned her, but the words passing between the men speedily undeceived her, yet startled her so that it was scarcely a relief. She rose noiselessly, and leaned her head against the partition, straining her ear to catch each word. 'M. le Chevalier at the château! Ah, what madness!' flitted through her mind as she listened. 'What can have brought him here—to his death?' Further listening told her that

there were papers and sums of money at the château which Alain de St. Aignan had, doubtless, come to secure. His mother had distrusted Leroux, and so far infected her husband with her own suspicions that he had left the papers and money in a secret hiding-place until someone whom he trusted could fetch them, instead of sending orders to his intendant to despatch them to Paris when the troubles began. Leroux cared comparatively little for the money, but he had a Frenchman's and a Celt's intense desire to possess land; to own Château St. Aignan was his heart's strongest wish. He hated the nobles, whom he had long served and by whom he had been regarded as merely a serviceable tool, with capabilities which merited the honour of being used by them; and it gave him indescribable pleasure to have his turn, and be master. The opportunity for which he had waited was come; the heir of St. Aignan and the title-deeds were within his grasp. Edmée understood perfectly what must be passing in his mind; he and Letumier were arranging with a third ally how a party of 'good patriots' were to be promptly collected, and while one set crossed by the bridge, another should take the shorter way over the river in the miller's boat, so as to secure both approaches to the château. There was a moment's debate whether one party should go to the mill at once, but it was decided first to call for the maire, and summon him to accompany them to arrest the Chevalier. The maire was one Martin Gautier, the blacksmith of Vaise, a jovial, honest fellow, who, having profited largely by the sale of the convent lands, thought that the Revolution had gone far enough, and, in his heart, feared Leroux and Letumier dismally. Leroux did not love Martin Gautier, and was glad of the chance of showing him reluctant to forward patriotic designs. It was therefore settled to fetch him, and to have a cart ready in which to convey the prisoner to Macon. There was no need for a pretext for arresting him. His noble birth was reason enough, not to mention that his elder brother had been taken fighting against his country in the ranks of the emigrants. The three men left the house, and Edmée stood up straight and white. 'Our dear lady's son! And my father has betrayed him! Ah, mother, thank God you are not here to know it!' And then the promise which that mother had bound her with came to Edmée's mind. 'My father will find it out and kill me. Well, then

I shall not marry Letumier! They shall not take M. le Chevalier—no, they shall not.’ She stood an instant, thinking: ‘Gautier’s house is at the other end of the village—then they will have to come all the way back here, and so to the mill before they separate. Yes, I can get the boat and cross, and then they must all go round by the bridge. There will be time.’

Edmée knew the trick of the boat-chain well; she was sure that she could undo it, and so cross the mill-pool. Leroux’s house stood on the edge of the village, and she might hope in the gathering twilight to leave it unperceived, or that, if anyone saw her, it would be supposed that she was going to see her uncle and aunt. Many, she knew, would be gathered to hear the *Annales Patriotiques* read aloud, for now newspapers were freely read in the village, the sale of which a few years before would have brought a colporteur to the gallows and the listeners to prison. Another change was the active cultivation of land which had been until now neglected. Edmée had some reason to hope that the villagers who were not at the club would be at work in the fields. She crossed the threshold and looked round. There was no one in sight but an old ragged woman, hobbling along towards her, though up in the village there was a cheerful stir. Madame Leroux had given many a bowl of soup to old Nicole; and when she saw Edmée she hobbled a little faster. Edmée quivered with impatience, but dared not excite attention by hurrying by. And yet every moment was inestimable! ‘Ah, my dear heart,’ whimpered the old woman, shaking her withered head and rearing herself on her stick before Edmée; ‘so she’s gone! she’s gone! and there’s one less to do a kind turn to a poor creature like me, who would have starved last winter but for her. When I used to lie awake of a night and hear the wolves howl and jump up at the windows and fall back into the snow, I thought all night long of the soup I should get from her the next day. There’s no one now to give a poor body a bowl of soup.’ Edmée saw that she should not get rid of the old woman until she had responded to the hint. ‘Sit down, Nicole,’ she said, ‘I will find you something to eat; only I cannot stay;’ and she looked anxiously towards the village from the top of the steps where she stood. Old Nicole clambered up one or two and settled herself comfortably. ‘Ah, you are Dame Edmonde’s

own daughter !' said she. ' You never miss the chance of a good work, and truly, since the world's coming to an end, what remains to us but to make our salvation ? But they will not let us even do that !' she added, in a lowered tone. ' The reverend fathers are all driven out of the monastery, and M. l'Abbé is in prison at Macon, and the King is dead, and the nobles gone, and I am just as poor as ever ; what is the use of having our liberty, as they call it, if one is no better off ? But you will not tell anyone that I said so, my little heart ?' added she, with sudden apprehension. ' I am only a poor old woman ; I don't understand these things. You are in haste ? You are going somewhere ?'

' Yes, I cannot stay ; I am going to the mill.'

' Ah, to the mill,' echoed Nicole, as if some unusual thrill in the girl's voice had struck her.

' I am late ; I dare not linger. If you see my father you will not say anything, Nicole ?' said Edmée, aware that to say this was perilous, but terribly afraid lest, as Leroux passed by, Nicole should unwittingly arouse his suspicions.

' I understand, I understand,' answered Nicole, rising, and putting down the empty bowl, with the self-satisfaction of one who in point of fact does not understand at all. ' There is no need to say his message was not carried to the mill an hour ago. Farewell, my heart, the saints keep you !'

She tottered away. Edmée dared not think how much time had been lost, but after one more scared glance towards the village, which assured her that as yet no one was coming thence, she ran down the moss-grown steps, and hurried towards the mill, asking herself as she went, if the miller's man were loitering about, or her aunt came out, what pretext she could possibly find for asking to be put across the river. None occurred to her ; she could only say desperately to herself : ' If I cross on the rocks, or wade the channel, I *will* get over !'

No pretext was needed. Not a living creature seemed stirring near the mill, and the boat was secured at the edge of the pool, where the water lay smooth and still, reflecting the wheel, now motionless, and the old wooden house, though further down it rushed furiously over the great stones in its course. She had often passed over the mill-pool, and, unloosing the boat, pushed across with the long paddle with all the force she could muster. She could see the château

standing half-a-mile off in the flat park, dark and solitary, its tall keep standing up conspicuous above the more modern part. Not a light was to be seen at any of the upper windows, nor a human being moving about it; for month's past only an old gardener and his wife had lived in the château, but her heart leaped up in fresh excitement as she ran towards it, at the sight of a gleam from a lower room, where neither Blaise nor his wife were likely to be. Edmée knew that it was there she must seek Alain de St. Aignan. She had not seen him for several years—not since he had outgrown his boyhood; she might not have recognised him had she met him, but he was the son of one whom she had passionately loved, and her errand was to hinder her own father from bringing him to the scaffold. Edmée knew well that a St. Aignan would only leave the prisons of Macon for the guillotine. What would happen should Leroux find out how she had crossed his purposes she scarcely thought. Hers was the woman's courage, which rises to confront an emergency, and the one thing in her mind was how to forestall Leroux.

CHAPTER III.

A REPUBLICAN WEDDING.

ALAIN DE ST. AIGNAN had never been within the walls of the château since the day when he bent over his mother's deathbed, to which a hasty summons had called him from his regiment. The tie between the mother and son had been peculiarly close; as Madame Leroux had implied, the eldest son, heir and representative of the family, had, as it were, belonged exclusively to the father; but Alain was the mother's own, the one who reflected her views and disposition, the deepest source of gladness in her life. It had been a happy, sunny life, although she was married to a man much older than herself, and they had few tastes in common. Madame de St. Aignan was a woman who found and made brightness wherever she went. Yes, she had been happy; Alain knew it, and it was almost the only thing on which

he could dwell without pain as he sat alone in the silent château, believing that no one knew of his arrival, and waiting for the protection of darkness before he left it. He was thinking much more of her than of the risk he ran or of the business which brought him, important as it was, and marvelling within himself that any circumstances could have so altered his feelings that, instead of the anguish which had filled him as he bent over her and saw the sweet eyes grow dim in death, he was absolutely thankful that she was gone. The three years since her death had been filled with so rapid and amazing a series of events that he was dizzy and bewildered, and could see nothing of whither the vessel was drifting amid the breakers, whose roar told of the rocks ahead. But a short space before this wild time the nobles had been everything in France; the whole nation seemed to exist only for them and the King. Then a breath of freer air began to blow; the doctrine spread that all classes had equal rights, all men were brothers; and while it filled some hearers with angry horror, very many among the privileged classes hailed it with generous enthusiasm, and urged it on by word and deed. A perception of the ills under which France was suffering seemed to become suddenly universal, and the wildest panaceas were proposed to cure them; while no one saw that it was impossible that a nation trained under a despotism should know what to do with liberty. The expulsion of the Protestants had destroyed that industrious middle class who would have had an interest in the stability of existing things; the miserable peasants were ground down by taxes, and were often scarcely more than serfs, and the commercial class were profoundly offended by the insolence of the nobles. All the social problems, which had been continually growing more and more complicated ever since the sixteenth century, rose up, demanding to be solved at once. In this general confusion power fell into the hands of men who had nothing to lose and all to gain by destroying everyone richer or nobler than themselves, with the nation's sense of wrongs which had accumulated for centuries to back them up, and with 'Would you be free? then cut off heads!' as a watchword. The utter disorganisation throughout the country in 1793 was indescribable; no one knew whom to trust or what to do, and many, through sheer timidity, sided with the most violent in their neighbourhood, by way of

securing a character for patriotism. Yet it was but a little while since the nobles had led the movement towards reform, and had voluntarily renounced their titles and privileges. Alain, while rapidly glancing through letters and papers, caught sight of a sentence in one which vividly recalled that memorable day when De Noailles stood up in the National Assembly, with Lameth and Lamboine, and volunteered in the name of his order to resign hereditary rights and honours. It seemed as if a great gulf lay between that day and this, as Alain recollected his own glow of enthusiasm, the indignation aroused in him by his brother's frigid disapproval, and the pain with which he had seen the ironical smile on his father's lips, as M. de St. Aignan observed, with a little significant gesture: 'We may give up our titles, but we cannot be born again as roturiers to please *ces messieurs*!' Alain only then understood that though his father was a philosopher and liberal in theory, in heart he was as utter an aristocrat as his eldest son, who had married into one of the most conservative families in France, and from the first had opposed all reforms with a persistency which had early brought all connected with him into danger. The present state of things seemed amply to justify him, and Alain felt it with inexpressible keenness and bitterness, yet felt certain all the while that at the bottom of all lay right and justice. One of the sharp trials of the time, especially to minds like his, was the difficulty of proving this, even to himself the inability to distinguish between the early desire for lawful reform and the madness and anarchy of the last two years. Another, equally keen, was the deep disunion which the Revolution had caused in families hitherto cordially united. M. de St. Aignan's liberal views, or what he called such, melted away at the first hint of danger; but, mere talk though they were, they had alienated his eldest son, who scarcely ever visited him, and would not even recognise Alain when they met; for Alain had not only embraced the popular side with a generous lad's enthusiasm, but upheld it as he grew older, viewing it from the liberal and serious point of view which he had learned to take from his mother's family. Madame de St. Aignan belonged to one of those great legal families who formed an unimpeachable nobility of their own, and had opposed despotism undauntedly, wherever they found it, even under a Richelieu or a Louis XIV., though their

voices had as far as possible been silenced, and the Parlements of Paris and the provinces crippled and shorn of their power.

And now Alain sat alone in the deserted château, his brother dead, and his father attempting to cross the frontier and escape into Switzerland, with a passport obtained through the disdainful kindness of a relation, whom for some years all the family had looked on with indignant coldness, as a very black sheep indeed. From the early days of the Revolution M. de St. Aignan had been bent on emigrating with his younger son, and that Alain should venture to oppose him was to him the strongest proof of all into what chaos the world had returned. There had been many arguments between them, furious on the one side, respectful but firm on the other. Now, once more, Alain seemed to find himself entirely in the wrong; he had refused to emigrate because it seemed to him a cowardly desertion of king and country, a fatal throwing away of the game; and here, at last, he found himself obliged to yield, and consider that they were only too fortunate if they could save their lives by this tardy flight. He had but a few hours to spare, and some of these he intended to spend in a hasty journey across country, to see a member of his family who was abiding whatever fortune might bring, in strict retirement, though not absolutely in hiding. He believed his presence at the château unknown, except to old Blaise, whom he trusted, and little guessed that while the daughter of his greatest enemy was flying to warn him, danger was approaching as rapidly as she. Some subtle sense of its neighbourhood, however, thrilled through him; he sat listening intently, and fancied that he heard a step. Edmée was standing breathless without; she saw him lift his head, pause, look round, then, as if reassured, bend again over the packet of papers which he was fastening up, and then start as she tapped with hasty imperative fingers on the window. He came and opened it at once, with enquiring looks. The pale face recalled nothing to him; perhaps he had hardly ever looked at the intendant's daughter, who was a mere child when he came to Vaise; but her agitation, though words died breathless on her lips, told plainly enough that her message was urgent.

'Whom do you seek, mademoiselle?' he asked, in the kind and courteous voice in which Edmée seemed to hear

his mother's tones. 'Come in,—nay,' as she shrank back, 'you can scarcely stand, what can I do for you?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing,' she gasped, letting herself be drawn into the room, and leaning on the back of a high chair to save herself from dropping to the ground: 'I came—oh, monsieur, do not lose a moment, they know that you are here, they come to take you to prison—'

'Ah!' said Alain, changing colour, 'Is it so? and to whom do I owe this warning?'

'I am Leroux's daughter—oh, do not linger!'

'Leroux's daughter!' said Alain, gathering up the papers which he had come at such risk to seek, 'I owe this friendly warning to him!' and there was an accent of surprise which showed that the young man had not put implicit faith in the steward. There was no time for an answer; before Alain could step through the window, before the faint cry had died on Edmée's lips, a party of armed men dashed open the door, while a second came suddenly round the angle of the house, and stood looking into the dimly-lighted room, into which their comrades were advancing with a shout of triumph at the sight of their prey. Leroux was among them, and his ally Letumier; behind came a party of bare-footed, bare-headed peasants, trying to look over each other's shoulders at the young noble. Alain had his hand on his pistols, but his first thought was how to shield the poor girl who had come to warn him; he hoped that in the gloom she might escape unnoticed, and stepped hastily forward, asking what they came for.

'For something which we have found,' answered Letumier, 'for an animal of an aristocrat, who has come here to try how much more he can rob the nation of before he goes off to our enemies. Here, friends, hand me a lantern; let us see what the young rascal was about before we lodge him at the expense of the nation,—nay, nay, you need not be in such a hurry; you may not find those lodgings exactly what you have been used to, my *ci-devant*.'

'He's in haste to see all his friends at Macon, but there's no fear of their running away, except to look out of the little window' (guillotine), laughed another, holding up the lantern and casting its unsteady light into the further part of the room. 'Why, what's that?' perceiving that there was someone yet unperceived there, 'a woman!' with an indescribable

accent, and throwing the gleam full on the face of Edmée as all the villagers pushed in, eager to verify the fact. 'A girl! Why, citizen Leroux!' as they all recognised the poor girl, who had made no attempt to escape, but stood as she had done all along, in white despair, 'by St. Guillotine! it is your daughter!'

There was an instant's dumb amazement, but the sudden, universal laugh with which the villagers recovered from their first stupefaction roused Leroux from his speechless fury. Advancing with a furious curse, he ordered Edmée to say what had brought her there, looking at her with deadly menace as words died on her quivering lips. Alain answered for her: 'Your business is not with this child, but me, messieurs; I am ready to follow you.'

'What, a man finds his daughter shut up in the dark with a young man, and he is not even to ask what it means! *voilà bien* these aristocrats!' said Leroux, with cold fury.

'Know what it means!' said Letumier, with a sneer, which made Alain set his teeth and colour hotly. 'Not much need to ask that!'

'At least I know this,' said Leroux, exasperated by feeling that his neighbours were hugely enjoying his discomfiture, 'that my house is no harbour for traitors to the nation. Let the huzzy go with him to Macon, since she is so fond of his company. I would send my own mother to the guillotine if she were not a good Republican! I would stand by and see her head fall into the basket joyfully if I suspected her of abetting the *ci-devants*!'

'Well said, citizen Leroux!' answered Letumier; 'a true patriot has no family except the Republic.'

He looked round for applause, and scowled angrily as he perceived that the laughter and the coarse jests which his companions had been showering on Alain and Edmée had ceased, and instead there was a murmur, which lashed up Leroux's fury afresh.

'I tell you I mean it!' he cried, with a secret fear that his daughter's having sided with the aristocrats would hereafter be used against him. 'What are we waiting for? Here!' to a couple of municipal guards, 'take the scoundrel of an aristocrat and this jade away at once!'

'Good heavens! have none of you an innocent daughter like this poor child?' exclaimed Alain, starting between

Edmée and the guards, who advanced rather reluctantly, looking enquiringly towards the maire, who seemed very slow to give any sign. 'What has she done but try to save a stranger's life out of sheer pity? I tell you I am ready to go where you like—straight to the scaffold if you will—but, unless you are downright fiends, you will let the girl go!'

'She does not darken my doors again,' said Leroux.

'As for that, she can come to me,' said his brother-in-law, the miller, who had held Leroux back with a strong hand when he would have seized on Edmée. 'At least, that is'—he stopped in evident embarrassment.

'Ah, friend miller forgot he had to ask Dame Magloire's leave,' said a voice, and there was a general laugh, for everyone knew that the burly miller dared not lift a finger without his wife's permission.

'Listen, friends,' said the maire, a man evidently superior to the rest, who had all along looked disturbed and reluctant; 'it would be a blot on our village if one of our lasses had to go to prison as a bad patriot; we should not like that story told in Les Vignes or Boissy, eh? We should have them crowing over us more than ever, and that would be hard on good patriots like us—we are all good patriots here, is it not so? We are not like some places, which have to send a dozen or two people to prison to prove it. Yes, yes, citizen Letumier. I know that Fouché has reproached us for having contributed so few to the prisons of Macon, but what does that show? that there are only good Republicans among us, to be sure. Are we to be free and equal only to have Fouché ordering us about as if he were our seigneur? No seigneurs for us, we are free citizens here! Bah! the daughter of a man like the citizen Leroux cannot be a traitor; the thing is impossible—there is only one aristocrat here'—pointing to Alain—'well, then, I have an idea; shall I tell it to you, my friends?' and, encouraged by signs of approbation from many of his audience, he resumed, with a laugh: 'They used to say in old days that man and wife were one; what do you say to our turning an aristocrat into a patriot by marrying him to a good Republican's daughter? Let the young *ci-devant* marry the girl, and send them about their business. What do you say to that?'

A roar of laughter and applause covered any dissent. Leroux's voice was inaudible. Alain smiled haughtily and

answered : ' You can insult me as you please ; my life is in your hands, but my honour and my name are my own.'

It was well for him that the noise drowned his words, as it did the faint protest of Edmée. The maire, who had come close up to him, answered in a lowered voice, ' You may talk of your honour, monsieur, but it seems to a plain man like me that honour would have you get the girl out of the scrape you have brought her into—well, well, that she has run into to serve you, if you like that better. What is to become of her ? And life is sweet ; you cannot have it twice, mind that !'

Alain knew it. He was only twenty-four, and life was sweet, even in all the wretchedness of the time. He looked, as the maire did, at Edmée, hiding her face on the back of the tall chair to which she had been clinging, overwhelmed with shame and misery. What indeed was to become of her ? He gave another glance at the evil face of Leroux, and knew that he could not leave her in those hands. Raising his voice above the tumult, he said, so that all could hear : ' Let it be so, on condition that you do not let any harm come to this girl.'

"Better marry than lose one's head," muttered one or two sullen voices, but the maire's suggestion had taken the fancy of the spectators, many of whom were more stupid than savage, and who could be mollified by a joke that they understood, and the miller was whispering to Leroux : ' Hold your tongue, man ; it will be all the easier to get the lands !' Leroux turned a dangerous look upon him ; he did not love to have his secret plans divined, but in the dim light he laid his hand unobserved on the bundle of papers on the table. The bystanders had drawn back, making a circle round Alain, who had brought Edmée forward, more dead than alive, and the maire, who in blue and red carmagnole, with his tri-colour scarf of office over it, hurried through the brief ceremony which was all that the law now required to bind man and wife. The girl submitted, stupefied with shame and emotion, but conscious through it all that thus only could Alain's life be saved, while his chief thought was that at all costs he must deliver the innocent creature who had left herself no protection but him. He scarcely expected to be allowed to go free, but he thought that the maire meant to stand by the poor girl, and was about to claim his promise for her, as the hasty ceremony concluded, when, with a sudden bound of the heart, as if new life had rushed into it, he heard him say, ' There !

the *ci-devant* has done his part, now let us do ours, friends and fellow-citizens, and that is to go home, or rather to the "Bonnet Rouge," where I will stand treat; what do you say?

On the whole the villagers were glad to let Edmée escape, and it was sweet to have seen both Leroux and one of their seigneur's family humiliated together. They went off in good humour, laughing all the more that Leroux and Letumier were not among them. Leroux had refused to see his daughter marry an aristocrat, and had disappeared, followed by Letumier, before the ceremony began. The maire turned back suddenly, saying he had forgotten his pen, and thus made an opportunity to say, low and hastily: 'Get out of reach as soon as possible, M. le Chevalier; the temper of the people may turn, and I should not be able to help you again. I have risked too much already. Be kind to this girl, she has had a hard life, one way and another.' He hastened after the others, and the newly-married pair were left alone.

CHAPTER IV.

A LONG NIGHT'S WALK.

EDMÉE had returned to her former position, and her face was hidden on the back of the chair behind which she had taken refuge. Alain stood looking at her with considerable embarrassment and perplexity. It was impossible to take her on his hasty and perilous flight; moreover, his passport naturally made no provision for a female companion, and to go even from one village to another without a passport was now as much as anyone's life was worth, under the terrible laws passed to check emigration. After a short consultation with himself he spoke, and the sound of his voice, kind and compassionate, yet cold, made her start. 'I fear I must take you a long way to-night, and at once.'

'Yes,' she answered, standing up immediately, without further question.

'For both our sakes there must be no delay, but—ah!' as he suddenly perceived the abstraction of the papers, with

an instantaneous perception that it was useless to seek them. 'Gone! as I might have expected; it is only surprising that they have left me the money and jewels. Come!'

He held out his hand, led her through the window by which she had entered a short hour before, and across the park; then they walked on silently over the plain, through the moonless night; myriads of stars in a cloudless sky gave a faint, indistinct light, by which they could distinguish the path which they must take. The smell of mint and balm and sage, which they trod on or brushed by, rose into the air; great moths fluttered by; the sharp cry of a bat overhead alone broke the stillness. There was not a dwelling in sight; they seemed the only living creatures in all the wide landscape. In after years that silent night-scene often rose unbidden before Edmée, though at the time she felt too bewildered and miserable to notice anything. Now and then Alain spoke, always in the same constrained and yet kind tone, and once when she lagged behind and looked over the parapet of a bridge which they were crossing, into the starlit water, he asked if she were tired, and proposed to rest. 'No, no,' she answered hastily, and they went on again. He could not guess how fierce the temptation had been to deliver him and herself from the yoke thrust upon them, by throwing herself into the stream which flowed glistening below. 'Would it have taken long?' she wondered to herself in a dazed way; and her fancy pictured her body rolled among the stones and carried away into the Saône, as if it were of someone else she was thinking. Alain thought her exhausted, and tried to make her take his arm, but she shrank away in such alarm as to call a smile to his lips. He sought to re-assure her by telling her something of his plans, and that he did not intend to oblige her to accompany him beyond Mortemart, a place which she knew by name; but so bad were the roads, and so small the communication between places off the beaten track, that she seemed to have no idea where it was, although but a few leagues from her birth-place. He asked her if she had ever heard of his aunt, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. 'Certainly!' she answered, so much surprised by the doubt as to forget her timidity for a moment, 'I have seen her at the château formerly.'

'Well then, it is to her that we are now going. I had al-

ready intended to visit her before leaving France, and it is with her that I hope to leave you—in good hands, my poor child : she is a kind, good woman, who will take care of you, and never forget what you have done for me. Shall you be content with this plan ?’

‘ Yes, oh yes—if she will let me.’

‘ She owes you the life of a nephew whom she loves,’ said Alain, kindly and seriously ; ‘ she will receive you willingly—but, *ma pauvre petite*, I do not even know whether we shall find her yet safe ; two days ago she was so, but who can count now on even twenty-four hours ? Mortemart is a small, out-of-the way town ; she may, perhaps, remain unnoticed, unless it occurs to some poor wretch to earn a few livres by denouncing an aristocrat. At all events, it is the best I can do for you.’

‘ And you ?’ she summoned courage to ask.

‘ I ? I go to join my father ; it may be that he has already reached Switzerland ; if not, we meet this morning and try to pass the frontier together. If possible, I will send news, but it grows daily more perilous for those who stay to have any communication with emigrants.’

Silence fell on them again. They walked on, until Alain began to fear that his companion’s powers would fail. If he had not hunted constantly over this district when a boy, he could not have found his way at all ; and it proved a longer and rougher journey than he had recollected, especially with the encumbrance of a female companion. Edmée did not know whether she were tired or not ; she only wanted to go on, and reach Mortemart, and have this *tête-à-tête* over, whatever reception might await her there. As morning dawned, however, and its cold grey light fell on her face, she looked so worn-out that Alain refused to go any further, and, sitting down under a tree, insisted on her resting.

‘ It is losing time ; every minute is precious,’ she murmured ; but she felt her strength fail, and obeyed his desire, so weary that, with her head on the coat which he took off and rolled up for a pillow, she dropped asleep.

Alain sat beside her, scarcely able to distinguish more than a dark form which lay under the shadow of the tree, recalling what had happened. The thought that but for a marvellous chance he should at this instant have been inside the prisons of Macon filled him with a horror such as he had

not in the least felt when danger was imminent. He saw now what the risk of returning to the château had been, and remembered unpleasantly his father's parting words, spoken lightly, with a little, sarcastic smile, but, as Alain could not but know, more in earnest than jest. "“I may possibly have another son, but if I lose my title-deeds, it is highly improbable that I shall ever have any more of them,”" muttered Alain to himself. 'How far will the son be welcome without the title-deeds, and with ——'

He looked down at Edmée, and smiled in spite of himself at the thought of what report he should have to make to M. de St. Aignan when they met. Dawn had come almost unperceived ; he could now see the young face, and the dark, sweeping lashes on the pallid cheeks. One hand was clasped on her breast, over something which even in sleep she held as if it were very precious. Alain wondered what it was, and then thought anxiously of the distance to Mortemart, and how little remained of the time which he had intended to spend there. He knew how anxiously he was expected, and how essential it was that he should go and come unperceived. He was unwilling to rouse Edmée, but the question was settled by the sight of someone in the distance, coming towards them. To a fugitive everything is startling ; Alain's first thought was that this man must bring danger with him. He looked earnestly towards the advancing traveller, and was a little re-assured by his air and costume, which had none of the distinctive marks of a Republican, but was rather that of an honest workman. He wore coarse, homespun breeches of brown cloth, grey stockings, a blue cloth coat, and a brown woollen cap. There was a knapsack on his back, and he had a stout stick in his hand. He, too, seemed to have walked through the night, but he came along with a steady, patient step, as if he could have gone on all day too. Alain laid his hand gently on the sleeping girl, lest she should be roused too hastily, and betray, by some incautious word, that they dreaded observation. She woke with a bewildered, enquiring gaze, soon passing into distressed recollection ; but, as with Alain, the sight of the traveller, nearer now, drove away all other thoughts. She looked up hastily at Alain, then again at the stranger. They could see him plainly now, and he had evidently perceived them ; his homely costume corresponded with features kindly, honest, and rather heavy ; and the un-

disguised wonder of his blue eyes, as he turned them from Alain to Edmée, was in itself re-assuring. No Frenchman but would have guessed some part at least of their story ; this must be a stranger, and therefore as little to be dreaded as anyone could be by people whose chief desire was to escape all notice. He stopped when he reached them, and asked in a strong Swiss accent how far he was from Mortemart, then sat down, unstrapped his knapsack, and offered them a share of the cheese and black bread which it contained. They accepted gratefully ; neither had eaten for many hours ; his honest, simple expression pleased Edmée, and she felt his presence a relief and protection. It would have seemed more formidable to be alone with Alain now that daylight had come than when they could not see each other's faces. When they rose to go, the Swiss rose too, taking it as a matter of course that they were to join company. There seemed no pretext for avoiding him, nor could they venture to hint how unwelcome an addition to their journey he was ; he strapped on his knapsack afresh, took his stick, and said in a friendly, simple sort of way, ' And since, as I think, there is no other town near, we must be all going the same way ! So much the better for me ! I shall not lose my way again, if you know the road.'

Edmée had risen, and gave an anxious glance at Alain, who was debating what to do, unable to guess how unsuspecting was the young Swiss, how inexperienced in all that was going on in the country whose frontier he had crossed so lately with a light step and a hopeful heart.

' Yes, we can guide you to Mortemart,' Alain answered briefly, with an inward hope of somehow shaking off his unwelcome companion, or at least of preventing his babbling of their meeting.

They went on, the Swiss saying, with a smile which gave a certain charm to his homely face, and lighted up his frank blue eyes pleasantly : ' People are better friends when they know each other's names ; mine is Bertrand Balmat, and my people are watchmakers near Locle.'

' Swiss ! There are a good many Frenchmen who would be glad to be where you, it seems, do not care to stay,' said Alain, without reciprocating the confidence.

' Ay ! those who love the old state of things better than the new ! Well, it leaves the more room for those who want to go to Paris, like me.'

‘To Paris!’ repeated Alain, astonished, for to him Paris seemed a vast trap, whence everyone was trying to escape.

‘Yes; you see, it has not been altogether easy; we are poor, and for a long time my father and uncle said there was only folly in it; but by-and-by they saw there was nothing else to be done. I could not put any heart into watchmaking, though it has been in our family ever since the trade was known in the country; so they have let me go.’

‘But for what end?’

‘Why, to be a painter!’ answered the Swiss, turning astonished eyes on his questioner, as if the thing were so clear to him that it must needs be so to everyone else.

‘Ah!’ said Alain, amused by the *naïve* simplicity of his companion. ‘And under whom shall you study?’

‘David!’ said Balmat, with an intonation of pride and satisfaction, as if to utter the very name were an honour. Very different was the effect which it produced on the Chevalier de St. Aignan. ‘David! David the —’ he scarcely suppressed in time the word ‘regicide.’

‘Yes, Louis Charles David, the regenerator of art, our great master!’ said Balmat, with beaming eyes.

‘You have, no doubt, introductions to him?’ said Alain coldly, and after a pause in which he struggled with the recollection that this David, whom the Swiss seemed to regard as something superhuman, was one of those who had voted the death of Louis XVI. that year.

‘No, none—how should I? But I shall show him my drawings, and ask leave to join his pupils. I have never had the chance of painting; I have only drawn with chalk and fusain—that is yet to come.’

There was such honest, joyful confidence in his voice and look that Edmée could not help giving him a sympathising smile. She had been looking with great interest at him ever since he announced his vocation. He had won her full confidence, and she would have had no fear in asking him to say nothing about them. Alain, however, taking it for granted that a would-be pupil of David’s must share the painter’s political views, was increasingly perplexed. ‘But since you are, no doubt, desirous of reaching Paris quickly, why linger at Mortemart?’ he suggested.

‘That is true, Monsieur, but what would you have? one cannot walk all the way to the capital without a halt. I

thought to make a short cut last evening, and lost my way, walking on till a lad told me an hour ago that this Mortemart was the nearest place to eat at—and so I go there. Besides, I have hurt my foot, and must look to it, lest I get laid up,' and Alain then observed what Edmée had seen already, that the young man was walking rather lame.

'I conclude your papers are all right,' he said, rather abruptly; 'these are not times to travel in without them.'

'Undoubtedly, Monsieur! It would be folly indeed to risk being delayed,' said Balmat; and Alain saw that, simple as he seemed, he had some of the shrewd sense of his countrymen.

'You know no one in Mortemart?'

'No, Monsieur, how should I?'

'My good friend, let me give you a piece of advice; call no one by that title if you wish to live long enough to be famous, or even to reach Paris!'

'Bien!' answered Balmat, quietly, but with a glance which took in both Alain and Edmée. 'I thank you for the warning.'

'You have yet to learn France,' said Alain, with something of an apology in his tone; 'these are days when a careless word—he stopped, by no means sure that he was not guilty of uttering just what he had condemned, for it had come to such a pass that no one felt sure that the man he spoke to, were he an old friend, might not denounce him. Balmat made no reply; his wondering, reflective look, could Alain have read it, said that he found himself in a world of new ideas, of which he could make nothing. As yet, France was to him merely a country which had shaken off a yoke of slavery, and the land where lived David, in whose atelier he should learn to be a painter. If rumours had reached his native village of how the Revolution was working, they had not interested him enough to enter his mind.

'You will find no inn open at such an hour,' said Alain, who had at last decided what course to take. 'It will be best that you come with me—us. A relation expects me, who will gladly entertain you.'

'Thanks, citizen,' answered Balmat, looking at Alain with a smile, as he showed that he had profited by the lesson received. 'I will go with you gladly.'

Used to the simple, cordial hospitality of his own country,

he saw nothing surprising in the invitation, which Alain gave, thinking that it could bring no danger on Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, or, indeed, might tell favourably for her, should it be known that she had received a guest on his way to Paris and David, and understanding enough of the man with whom he had to deal to feel that he would scarcely betray those who had shown him hospitality.

‘Are we near Mortemart?’ Edmée asked, with a beating heart. It was the first time that she had spoken voluntarily. The prospect of facing Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and hearing her story told was growing very terrible.

‘Yonder!’ said Alain, looking on into what was still lost in the dimness of very early morning. Edmée could only see bare hills, whose summits were so fantastically broken into battlemented crags that at first she thought them a line of ruins.

‘Have they been pulling down all the châteaux here?’ she asked in alarm; but even as she spoke the first rays of the sun rose over the hill-tops, casting a yellow light on their bleak slopes, and into the mist rising in the valley, and making all the dew-drops sparkle on the gossamers spread over the ground. ‘It is growing late,’ said Alain, quickening his pace, as he looked towards Mortemart, still nearly half-a-mile away, clustering over a little hill. The house of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was on the outskirts; it had belonged to her family for a considerable time, but had never been used by them, until, after the death of Alain’s mother, her life-long friend, she had removed there, somewhat to the surprise and discomfiture of her brother, to whose opinions, however, neither then nor at any other time had she ever been known to pay any attention. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was something of a Republican, as at one time were many women of rank in France, but with her it was not a mere matter of fashion; liberal views suited her turn of mind and slightly sceptical temperament, and her influence had told on Alain. As yet she had lived unmolested, and had ventured on communicating occasionally with him. The house stood in a great shady garden, with high walls round it, over which some tall trees raised their heads; but on one side it communicated by a court with the street. Alain avoided this way of approaching it, and turned under the wall, below which was a steep slope, with a small rapid stream at the foot of it. There was a small door in this wall, but it had only been used to descend to the stream by, when a boat was wanted;

and no one had required the steps leading down to the water for so long that they had fallen into ruins, and no path led over the steep and slippery turf embankment. It was, however, along this slope that Alain intended to conduct his companions, hoping to enter unperceived, and before anyone in the town or fields was astir. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as he knew, had but one old servant, having made her reduced fortunes the welcome pretext for dismissing all the others, without offending them. Alain made a hasty explanation to Balmat as they took this unexpected way, instead of entering the town, and saw the eyes of the young Swiss fix steadily upon him, with a kind of wondering thoughtfulness, which seemed a reproach. He stood suddenly still. 'Listen, my friend,' he said; 'after all I know not whether I am not bringing you into danger. You are a Swiss, therefore one of a nation who cannot betray a man who trusts you. I must not be seen here; my papers might chance to be less *en règle* than yours, were they inspected. I must place this—this lady'—he looked at Edmée—'in safety, and get away as soon as may be. Perhaps it were better to part from us, even if you wait till morning in the street, than mix yourself in our affairs.'

It was hurriedly and loyally said, and Edmée looked up with proud satisfaction. Balmat thought for a moment, as if it were too much the habit of his mind to deliberate for an instant decision to be possible to him; then, with what Edmée secretly called *ce bon sourire* he said, in the calm, slow voice which accorded well with his turn of mind: 'Why, would you have me miss my first chance of being useful to you? How are you going to get—her—over this slope? Is it not true that a Swiss foot is wanted? Come, then'—he evidently could not tell whether to say Madame or Mademoiselle, and compromised it by 'Citoyenne'—'take my hand; this stick will steady us.'

Edmée gave her hand gladly; it was much easier to let herself be helped and guided by this stranger than by Alain, who went first and opened the door by a key which his aunt had contrived to send him. It opened so easily that it was evident that measures had been taken to cause those old hinges to turn noiselessly; and the three stood within the garden and looked towards the house. A window on the ground-floor had a light burning in it, and they could see that

there was someone sitting at a table, on which an untouched meal was spread. All through the long night Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had watched with increasing anxiety, and hope sinking lower and lower, as the hours went by and no one came. She was by no means a nervous woman; but this night every rustle in the leaves or flutter of a bird had made her start and gaze out, until at last she said to herself: 'He will not come; he cannot, it is too late. I ought not even to wish for it now. But what can have happened?'

Terrible question in those days! and her imagination was not far astray when it pictured him discovered and arrested; but in its wildest flight it would never have suggested how he had been delivered.

CHAPTER V

EXPLANATIONS.

'No, he will not come. But what has happened?' Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was repeating to herself, just as two figures stood outside the window; and raising her eyes, full of tears, she started in joyful surprise and hurried to admit them. 'Alain! my dear boy! at last!' she exclaimed, for the first moment seeing nothing but him; and then perceived the slender shrinking girl, whom he held by the hand, she added, in great wonder, 'You are not alone!'

'No, dear aunt; here is one whom I must leave to your care, whom you will shelter gladly for my sake—one to whom I owe my life, and who is my wife.'

'Your wife!' exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, but then, seeing the imploring, voiceless gesture of Edmée, who was trembling so that she could scarcely stand, she added, with grave kindness: 'My child, I need ask no more; my nephew's wife, even without such a claim of having saved his life, is welcome to me.'

'Ah, mademoiselle, if I might tell you—if you would make him understand,' faltered the poor girl, shrinking from the kind embrace, and almost choking with the tears suppressed till now—'it is not—I am not——'

'She is worn out,' said Alain, in answer to a keen, dis-

quieted look from Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; 'we have walked from St. Aignan.'

'Worn out! doubtless, and the only thing is now to let her rest,' said the aunt. 'Come, child, there are some things for which there is no cure but sleep. My boy, I shall soon return,' she added, leading away the passive Edmée, but with something in her voice which told how much it cost her to lose a moment with him.

'But listen, dear aunt,' said Alain, conscious that Balmat was waiting in the garden outside, 'I have—bah! she is gone, and what am I to do with my Swiss? Well!' and he shrugged his shoulders at the complicated difficulties in which he found himself. 'My friend—*hé*, Balmat! come here, and profit by what the gods send you—a shelter, and food, and a moment to eat it in. My aunt will soon return, and meanwhile let us lose no time.'

Balmat entered at the call, and looked round with pleased interest, noting everything, from the clock on the mantelpiece, in which he probably felt a professional interest, to Rousseau's '*Devin du Village*,' lying open on a little harpsichord.

'There is no telling what may be useful some day in a picture,' he said, in an explanatory way to Alain, and then, gravely folding his hands, and bowing his head, said a short grace aloud and reverently, unconscious of Alain's amused wonder, which gave place an instant later to a grave and softened look. The manner and action of the young Swiss had recalled lessons learned at his mother's knee, and moved him much. He had scarcely taken his place at the table when the tap of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's high heels was heard, and she re-entered, saying, 'I would hear nothing from that poor tired child, but now—ah! another!' she suddenly exclaimed, perceiving Balmat, and turning looks of consternation and wonder on her nephew; 'Monsieur! I am happy to see you. My nephew's friends are all welcome,' she added, as Balmat rose and bowed respectfully; but there was an irresistibly comic expression in her face, as she looked at Alain, as if to demand how many more guests or connections she might expect.

'No friend, madame, only a fellow-traveller, whom Monsieur your nephew has kindly brought here for an hour's rest,' said Balmat, looking with delighted admiration on a

face whose high-bred charm and dignity were a revelation to him. 'He must have much to say to you, and little time to spare; so, with your leave, I will take my supper into the garden, and finish it there. It is too good to leave altogether,' he added, with wistfulness which provoked her to laughter.

'I had forgotten that anyone *could* laugh,' muttered Alain to himself, looking with a sort of curiosity at his aunt, and hardly able to believe that the last months could have gone by without altering her. He had met women, and men too, in Paris, changed beyond recognition by the anguish and terror that had been concentrated into a few weeks. But Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had hitherto lived a comparatively sheltered life, and there was still the beautiful bloom, the clear blue eye, and gay smile which made her in middle age perhaps more fascinating than in girlish freshness. Alain's heart warmed as he looked at her.

'Nay, monsieur! let me see you both eat, and then, if you will, there is a sofa at your disposal in that little room, where you might rest before leaving us; it is scarcely day yet,' she said, suppressing her strong desire to have her nephew to herself, and hear at full length the story which she would not let the exhausted, weeping Edmée tell her.

Balmat readily accepted the invitation to remain, but his hostess was strongly tempted to repent it, as he proceeded through his deliberate meal. She stifled many sighs of impatience, and could hardly refrain from ordering him off long before he rose, said grace again, and retired, as she had recommended, to the room and the sofa, where sleep fell upon him long before Alain had given an outline of his story. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan listened with deep interest, her unusual gravity showing how much she was moved.

'Yes, yes, you did right; you could not have done otherwise,' she said, as he paused. 'The poor child! But what will my brother say, Chevalier?'

She turned a half-humorous look on Alain, who could only shrug his shoulders again by way of reply.

'To get no title-deeds; ah! I suppose that villain Leroux must have swept them off—they disappeared in the confusion, you say?—and to have instead a daughter-in-law, whom he had not counted on—'tis a little hard, one must own; but he will console himself by saying it is no marriage.'

'I know that,' answered Alain in a low voice.

‘No more it is,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, turning on him quickly. ‘And you?’

‘Noblesse oblige,’ was Alain’s answer.

‘That is true, Chevalier, so true that, if I knew where a priest could be found, I should say have it all made fast once for all; but since that cannot be—’

‘And since she cannot possibly share my flight, I can only leave her here with you until I return, and Heaven knows when that will be!’

‘Yes, her home is here,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. ‘You have done right to bring her to me, since your mother is no more.’

She was a proud woman; in spite of her liberal views she had the calm, innate pride of one nobly born, with uncontested rights and privileges, who smiles in serene amusement should anyone in his ignorance question them; but it never occurred to her as possible that Alain should not stand by the promise which he had made, though to neither did this civil marriage seem binding. ‘As long as I can I will shelter the child.’

‘You have not been molested? No one has threatened you?’

‘No, they leave me in peace, as yet. I have had a long time of quiet, for anyone who is spared an hour in these days may count it a year,’ she said, with a look and tone which, though they replaced but for an instant her usual smiling and philosophical cheerfulness, told unmistakably how she looked on the prospects of the future.

‘And you are resolved to remain? You are convinced that it is wise? My father has urged emigration from the first, would have gone long ago had I consented, and since the King’s death Yes, I must go, while you stay!’ said Alain, full of bitterness at the thought of flying when a woman refused to do so.

‘Oh! my brother!’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, at no pains to conceal her opinion that it mattered very little to anyone but himself whether Monsieur de St. Aignan went or stayed. ‘He has only himself to please; but for you and me, nephew, it was different. You know I have never favoured Coblenz—never could see that the way to strengthen the throne was to leave it unsupported, nor that to convince the people we loved France as well as they, we should run out of the country, or come back in arms against it. But mind

you, I think now that you have no choice but to go. You have stayed till the last possible moment, and your father will not stir without you. He cannot stay; he will go out of his wits from sheer terror of the guillotine and the mob. I know him. You must have gone through some stormy discussions with him, my poor Chevalier! Ah, I wonder when we shall meet again! Well, after all, I would not have you take the part that your cousin, De Pelven, has; first hand and glove with the Palais Royal, and now, it seems, a Jacobin; what does your father say to that? Why, five years ago I recollect his marching out of the room at one door because De Pelven had come in by another!’

‘De Pelven warned me that my father was to be arrested.’

‘De Pelven! There is some good left in him then! Did you see him?’

‘Yes, he came to me at night, and asked our plans. I told him that my father wished nothing better than to leave France, but that he was equally set on securing the money and title-deeds left at the château.’

‘And then?’ asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with some suspicion.

‘He agreed that it was absolutely necessary, and we concerted means for my father’s leaving Paris, and waiting for me on the frontier. Immediately after this I got your letter, and left Paris a day sooner than I had intended, to gain time to see you.’

‘De Pelven knew this?’

‘No, I had no means of letting him know, and it was needless. Communication with suspected persons like ourselves could only bring him into danger. He had done his utmost—more than I could have possibly expected—unasked too.’

‘Yes. I do not understand it. It is not like De Pelven,’ muttered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to herself. ‘Well, tell me your plans as far as you know them, and what chance I have of hearing from you.’

Little enough, it seemed, for to communicate with an *émigré* was risking life. Alain could only say that his father’s plan was to await in Switzerland what turn events might take. Such a tempest as this must naturally cease ere long—its very violence forbade its lasting.

‘I cannot tell,’ was all Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s answer.

There was so much to hear and to tell that all seemed yet to be said when the parting could no longer be delayed. The brief hour, which was already more than could safely be snatched, was gone. Both rose up for what they knew might be a last farewell; Alain was very pale, and tears trembled in the eyes of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

‘Farewell, my boy, my dear boy! God keep you! I will do my best with the poor child. I wish you went out a free man, but as it is, recollect what you owe her. Ah! I had forgotten; she would not be calmed until I had promised to give you this.’

Alain recognised with astonishment a morocco case which he had keenly regretted having left at St. Aignan.

‘My mother’s miniature! This then was what she was holding! How did she come by it?’

‘I asked no questions; I was in too great a hurry to return to you, but she has a will of her own, that slender child—she held me fast till she had made me hear. “’Tis marraine,” she said, “and tell him he is free”—so I took it, and promised anything she liked.’

‘Marraine!’ repeated Alain, looking up from the miniature, at which he had been gazing with moistened eyes.

‘Yes—do you not recollect that Leroux’s wife was a favourite of your dear mother’s?—and this child—what is her name?’

‘Upon my word I do not know!’ said Alain, laughing and colouring. ‘It was said when we went through our parts, with the Maire for a priest, and a tricolour scarf for his vestments; at least I suppose so, but I cannot recall it. It is too absurd not to know one’s wife’s name!’

And so, glad to cover emotion with a smile, they parted, Alain to endeavour to make his way through a thousand dangers to the rendezvous where Monsieur de St. Aignan was vituperating his delay, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to rouse and get rid of her Swiss, before his presence should be perceived, and cause enquiries which might lead too far. He gratefully accepted both the provisions which she offered, and her proposal to bandage his foot, and there was something in his simple, cheerful ways which rested and refreshed her, while calling up a smile of amusement. She felt as many a care-worn man or woman does on coming in contact with an innocent child, to whom the anxieties and pains of life are

things unknown, and willingly gave him a few moments, now that they were not taken from Alain, to listen to his short history, and hopes for the future, though her thoughts now strayed to her nephew, now to the means of procuring from the Maire of Mortemart a permit for Edmée to remain, without entering on dangerous explanations. Balmat had had Republican prejudices against aristocrats, but they melted away like the snow of his native country under the Föhn before he made his adieux, and set out for Paris, little dreaming when and how they were to meet again, but with his imagination full of his charming hostess, and, though his natural discretion had prevented him from asking a single question, some wonder as to the connection between the young noble, as he was quite shrewd enough long since to have perceived Alain to be, and the silent girl, who seemed to shrink from his eye, and avoid his touch.

‘Bah! there are strange things in this France!’ Balmat said to himself, and his mind turned again to art and David, as he stepped out along the endless white road, bordered by elms, which stretched on and on, and would not end, but was in time to lead to Paris and to fame.

CHAPTER VI.

EDMÉE FINDS A FRIEND.

MADemoiselle de St. Aignan returned to Edmée with the problem still unsolved of how she was to account for her presence, without a passport, at a time when no one was permitted to stir until numerous tedious formalities had been gone through, though it were but from one village to another. The withdrawal of the numerous families who had emigrated, which at first had been looked on with savage joy, or contempt, was now perceived to have greatly impoverished the country; and the knowledge that the *émigrés* were appealing to foreign powers to invade France, and saw no treason in fighting their countrymen, had roused a vindictive fury equally fatal to the suspected, whether they stayed or at-

tempted to escape. And it was hard to say who was not now suspected. The Revolution, with its just protests against time-honoured abuses, its thrilling declaration that all men were brothers, had become a war of class against class, a tyranny such as the world had never yet seen, though it had had many a warning of what must come, if the ruling classes persisted in blinding their eyes and shutting their ears, and the Church coldly looked on, or actively aided and abetted.

There was a line of care on Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's forehead as she sought Edmée. She had revolved many schemes in vain. Once she had thought of requesting the maire of Mortemart to come to her, but rejected the idea, feeling that so great a personage would naturally expect her to go to him, a step which would excite too much attention in the little town, and to which, moreover, she could not make up her mind, for to stand as a suppliant before her grocer, maire though he might be now-a-days, was more than she could quite swallow. To send Edmée with a plausible story suggested itself, but the appearance of a stranger would excite as much enquiry as if Mademoiselle de St. Aignan herself had been seen on her way to the mairie, and besides Edmée might be betrayed into perilous admissions—perilous both to herself and others. The line of care was very marked as Mademoiselle de St. Aignan entered the room where she expected to find the girl sleeping, but Edmée lay with wistful, open eyes, and sprang up at once as her hostess came in, exclaiming, 'Ah, mademoiselle, did you tell him? Does he understand?'

'I gave him your message, my child.'

'And he sees—he knows I never supposed he would be bound to me? that I knew he would be free? It was to save his life that I consented. No one could hold it a real marriage, and if it were, they say that anyone can have a divorce now. You have told him so?'

'You are very anxious to be free, my poor child; perhaps there is someone to whom you would be more willing to be bound?' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, unable to understand the girl's passionate vehemence.

'I?' she answered, in such uncomprehending surprise, that the suspicion was silenced at once. 'I was not thinking of myself!'

'How came you to try to save him, child? How did you know of his danger?'

'I heard . . . people planning to seize him ; they said he was at the château, and I thought of marraine, and how I had promised my mother always to do what I could for a St. Aignan.'

'Your mother—is she living?'

'No, she was buried last week,' said Edmée, lifting her eyes with so strange an expression of triumph, and almost rejoicing, that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was much startled.

'Child ! did you not love her, then?'

'Love her?' was Edmée's astonished answer. 'Did you ask if I loved my mother, mademoiselle?'

'It would not seem that you grieved over her death?'

'No, I did not—how could I? I was glad when she was in her grave, for even *he* could not torment her there,' said Edmée, in a voice low indeed, but thrilling with such inextinguishable resentment that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan started, and thought within herself, 'What sort of man can this Leroux be?' but she said aloud, in a tone of reproof, 'I am called over-liberal by some, but let me tell you that I have an old-fashioned belief that children should honour and love their parents.'

'They should, no doubt, mademoiselle,' said Edmée, seriously, and without any attempt at justifying herself, and her hostess felt it useless to pursue the subject.

'You have not yet told me your name,' she said.

'Edmée, mademoiselle.'

'Ah ! my dear sister-in-law's name. And you are her godchild?'

'Yes,' and the smile which for the first time illumined the girl's wan face was a revelation to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

'Ah ! you are a Berrichonne,' she said, contemplating her attentively, and beginning to perceive a promise of beauty in the features now white and thin, but with great purity of outline, and perhaps possessing, at a happier moment, the fair and rosy complexion often seen in Berri, and said to be traceable to those English invaders who long occupied the province.

'Yes, my mother was from Berri, like marraine.'

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan noticed the tender tone in which this last word was always spoken by the girl. It attracted her towards Edmée, and she took her hand, and said, 'You were very fond of my sister, child?'

'Ah, yes. You cannot guess, mademoiselle, what paradise it was to visit the château ; how lovely everything was,

and she most of all! I think that a queen could not have been more beautiful!’

‘And you sometimes met my nephew there?’

‘I have seen him, of course, but not for several years—not since my dear marraine—’

‘True—true—he has not been there since her death,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, looking at Edmée with puzzled curiosity. ‘It was then for her sake that you ran the risk of warning him?’

‘Surely, mademoiselle,’ answered Edmée, quite as much puzzled in her turn.

‘But if you had been discovered after he escaped?’

‘Yes, I know,’ she said, shuddering far more now than when the danger was present, and she added, as if in haste to change the subject, ‘I recollect once seeing you at the château—you came into the conservatories.—Mademoiselle, is the Swiss painter here still?’

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could not see the connection between this question and what had gone before, though it was quite clear to Edmée.

‘No, he went soon after my nephew left me.’

‘Monsieur le Chevalier is gone!’ There was mingled relief and dismay in Edmée’s voice.

‘Yes.’

‘Ah! dear mademoiselle, it is very hard for you?’ said Edmée, with a shy, caressing gesture. ‘And you have me instead, whom you did not want.’

‘That is the very thing I came to talk to you about, my little one. You are here without passports or papers of any kind to show your identity; it is very perilous for you.’

‘And for you?’ Edmée asked quickly.

‘For us both; especially if your connection with my nephew be discovered. If we only knew anyone who would answer for your patriotism—’

‘I am not a patriot, mademoiselle—I hate patriotism!’

‘Silly child! what do you know about it?’

‘Mademoiselle, the seigneurs may have done wicked things, and treated us ill, but they never could be such tyrants as people of my class will make if they get the upper hand; I know how some of them rule their own families!’

‘You are more of an aristocrat than the nobles themselves, *petite*. But we are as far as ever from the point of

how to explain your presence here to Monsieur le maire, or even to my old Nanon; it is true that she is deaf and purblind, which is why I kept her in preference to any of her fellow-servants, but she is unfortunately not blind enough not to see you at all, and I would not have her chatter of guests arriving here in the night. Bah! I was never meant for a conspirator! I have left all the remains of our meal *en évidence*; I must go and remove them.'

'Let me help you, mademoiselle, do let me help you! Have you really no servant but this Nanon?'

'And so much the better, child! Do you think I am less happy because I have no valets or lady's maids? I have breathed more freely ever since they all went, and we parted civilly. Many a one would be glad to be quit of them all, if it could be done without danger. It does not do to offend a person who may walk off and denounce you, and yet one cannot exactly feel easy when one knows that one has half-a-dozen spies under one's roof! Come, we have no time to lose. Nanon should soon be stirring.'

'Mademoiselle,' said Edmée, as they went downstairs to remove all traces of the guests, 'might I not go quietly out, and ring at your door as if I had just arrived? I could say to Nanon that I had no friends to whom to go, and that as your family had formerly been kind to me—ah, how true that is!—I had come here. She cannot wonder at that.'

'It seems the best plan for the moment,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, relieved even by this poor expedient; and just then they heard old Nanon's heavy step overhead. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan hastened back to her own room, after cautiously letting Edmée pass through the court, into the yet silent and empty street, where she stood for a few moments, looking round her. It was always a silent, gloomy street, and the high walls of a convent rose opposite. She raised her eyes to the blank expanse, thankful that there were no windows whence curious gazers might perceive her. The convent within was invisible, but had all its windows overlooked her, no one would have appeared at them, for the nuns were all scattered, some in England, others in Belgium, and some in the graves whither the guillotine had sent them. Further on she saw the 'hotel' of some noble family, but the arms carved in stone above the doorway were mutilated by recent violence. Beyond came the 'Place,' with a desecrated

church on one side and old houses and shops filling up the three others. Edmée had no time to observe more than that the garden of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan almost reached the church; she feared to linger, and rang the bell with a hasty hand. No one answered it; either Nanon had not heard, or did not choose to hear. She rang again, and then a little old figure came out of the house, and peered suspiciously out at the 'grille,' with a sidelong look, turning the least-deaf ear a little upwards. Edmée tried to give the explanation which she had prepared, but only got a peevish shake of the head for answer, and a sign to go away. She tried raising her voice, with no better effect. It was necessary to have recourse to pantomime, and this succeeded better, for the gate was a little unclosed by Nanon's skinny hand, and Edmée slipped in, and followed the old woman, who went before her, shaking her head and mumbling to herself. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan met them. 'Why, whom have you there, Nanon?' she asked in the cheery, distinct voice which the deaf ears were used to, and which reached them readily.

'How should I know, mademoiselle? she was at our gate, and would not go away, and it is not well to call notice on oneself now-a-days, so I let her in; and perhaps she will speak to you, though she does nothing but mumble when I try to understand her, so that there is no hearing a word she says, and mademoiselle knows I hear well enough. Do I ever fail to hear her?'

'No, never, my good Nanon. But what are we to do with this child? You see she says that she has lost her last friend, the poor little thing, and, having known my family formerly, has sought me in her trouble.'

'We must let the maire know, and show her papers, mademoiselle. But people should not come unasked thus; it makes talk in a place; it is not fair on quiet folks, who only want to be forgotten,' said Nanon, surveying Edmée with mingled dislike and suspicion. 'Where does she come from? Does mademoiselle really know her? She must think of herself and me, and not be too kind-hearted—it is a great fault to be too kind-hearted.'

'Not one of yours, my poor Nanon!' murmured her mistress, adding aloud, 'She belongs to a family I have known for years; but she came in such haste that she has no papers.'

Nanon's wrinkled face became purple with angry alarm. 'Come here without her papers! Holy Virgin!' she exclaimed, her voice rising to a shrill scream. 'She will bring us all to prison; she cannot stay, mademoiselle; she must go this instant!—Go, then, go, cruel, wicked girl!'

'But where is she to go to, Nanon? she has no home.'

'Mademoiselle, is it any reason because she has no home that we are to have no heads? and so it will be if we keep a girl with no permit. Ah, blessed saints! why did I let her in? You little huzzy, what business have you to bring danger on harmless people, who never saw you before, nor wanted to see you? Is it not enough already that mademoiselle is an aristocrat, without more danger? But go, then, I say!'

'Hush, hush, Nanon, the child has come to me in her trouble, and all we have to do is to arrange as best we can for her safety.'

'Does mademoiselle mean that she is resolved to keep her?'

'Undoubtedly, Nanon.'

'Then she must excuse me, but I leave her. It is not everyone who would run the risk I have, by serving a noble; one ought to think more of oneself than I have ever done. I hear it often said that I am no good patriot, and that I eat the bread of aristocrats. Until now I have borne this, mademoiselle, but I will have nothing to do with *gens sans aveu*. I go. You may choose between us.'

'Ah, this must not be!' began Edmée, in great distress; but Mademoiselle de St. Aignan silenced her.

'Hush, my child; no one shall dictate whom I do or do not welcome in my own house; and Nanon will think better of this—before she leaves the only person likely to put up with her,' she added in a lower tone. Perhaps Nanon's ears were not so deaf as she chose to make out, or else indignation sharpened them.

'Mademoiselle is very good, but she may find herself mistaken,' she retorted. 'I hope that this pale-faced thing may be as useful to her as I have been, and bring no trouble on her; but as for me, adieu, ladies;' and, making her little bent figure as erect as she could, Nanon marched out, leaving her mistress and Edmée looking at each other. Her steps were heard about the house for some time, as she gathered

her possessions together; then the outer door was opened, and shut with a bang full of angry protest, and all was still. Nanon had executed her threat.

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan shrugged her shoulders, and Edmée was surprised to see as much amusement as vexation in her face. 'Can you cook, petite?' was all she said, after a few moments' silence. 'Ah! that is well; we shall not starve, at all events, unless the butcher decline to supply an aristocrat. By the afternoon we shall have surely hit out some plan for your safety. Old Nanon would have left me sooner or later, as matters grew more threatening, and her sense of duty to herself stronger. Now let us attend to our household affairs. I might have been left without you to help me, and what should I have done then? It is not so easy for me to move briskly about as for some,' she added, laughing; 'I have too much *enbonpoint*, and I cannot walk fast in my high-heeled shoes, nor at all without them. That alone shows I was not intended for a flight. Now, then, child; that we must eat and drink, and attend to daily trifles, is the only thing that keeps one in one's senses now-a-days.'

'May I gather a bouquet for your salon, mademoiselle?'

'Surely—you are fond of flowers then?'

'Yes, oh yes! Do you recollect an old flower-painter who used to come to the château, and give Marraine lessons in painting? I used to sit by her sometimes, in the conservatory, and watch him, and wish so much that I could do it too! Marraine let me try, and he was very kind to me, though I was but a troublesome little thing then; he gave me two brushes and some colours, to keep me honest, he said, one day when he found me hiding a brush which he had dropped; I did want it so much, and I was only a child then—'

'What are you now, petite?'

'Ah, mademoiselle, I never was really a child, if feeling free and happy means that. Even when I was at the château it was always hanging over me that I must go home by-and-by. But those were good days. He said I could paint if I had lessons. I have tried ever since, but without teaching one cannot do much. Do you remember him, mademoiselle? a M. Delys?'

'Yes, I have seen him, and I have heard my sister speak of him. We must somehow get you colours and brushes,

my child,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, well pleased with these innocent confidences, and glad to be able to like the girl without an effort.

'Ah, you are too good!' she answered, with beaming eyes. 'First of all I wanted to do what marraine did, and then it was such pleasure; one saw so many things in the flowers which one never did till one tried to copy them. After the château was shut up, I could still go and paint in the conservatories; old Pierre kept them in order, and marraine had always given me a present on my birthdays, so I was able to buy canvas and colours, when anyone went to Paris, or came back to the village.'

'That could not have happened often, I imagine.'

'Pardon, mademoiselle; Jean Croz, one of the valets at the château, used sometimes to visit his old mother, and he was a good-natured man, and would manage to get what I wanted.'

'And your father could procure materials, for doubtless he sometimes went to see my brother in Paris?'

'He did, mademoiselle.'

'Then you could entrust your commission to him?'

Edmée made no answer at all, and her silence was eloquent.

'Child, tell me what he did to you? did he beat or ill-use you?'

'Never, mademoiselle.'

'Then how did he treat you?'

'He made us live every moment of the day and night in fear,' answered Edmée.

'Well, I suppose that is the worst cruelty, and the hardest to forgive; but times are strangely out of joint, and the closest ties seem snapped,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, half to herself. 'There, we will not talk any more about it.'

The morning passed cheerfully enough; if Mademoiselle de St. Aignan were uneasy, she did not show it, and made Edmée feel so safe and at ease with her that the girl thought a new life was beginning for her. The sense of relief on her mother's account was stronger than that of her loss, and she had only shared the sufferings of the cowed and unhappy woman, without ever finding support or guide in her. All the happiness that she had ever experienced had come through the St. Aignans; it seemed perfectly natural to find

herself' with one of that family, and it was unspeakably blessed to know that her father had no knowledge of whither she had fled. There was an elasticity in her step, and a light in her eyes as had hardly ever been there before, as she moved about the silent old house, glad to feel herself of use, and looking with ever new pleasure into the fine face of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with its kind looks. It was sweet to have saved Alain, and kept her word to her mother, and the civil marriage appeared more and more unreal now that he was out of sight; although the circumstances of her life had prevented her from knowing the light-heartedness of childhood, in many things Edmée was a child still.

CHAPTER VII.

FRIEND OR FOE?

ONE of the occupations of that morning was converting part of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's wardrobe into garments for Edmée, who found herself totally unprovided, and was somewhat distressed at using for herself materials which the customs of the times confined to those of higher station than herself, and the remarks of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan that they now belonged to the same station, when she ventured a timid objection, did not reconcile her to the necessity. She could not feel that she belonged in any way to the upper ranks, or, rather, she vehemently refused to believe it. That hasty ceremony could have made no real difference; she was still only Edmée Leroux. Indeed, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had much the same feeling, and could as yet scarcely realise that, had titles still existed, this girl was Vicomtesse de St. Aignan. Her nephew was in fact now Vicomte de St. Aignan, his brother's death having given him that title, though she still thought of him as the Chevalier.

It was while both were engaged with needlework that a ring was heard at the door. A brief debate as to who had better open it was settled by the danger of appearing to hide Edmée; she went to the grille of the court, and was sur-

prised to see no formidable official, no one who looked as if he belonged to Mortemart; but a well-dressed gentleman, though to wear clean linen, or look like a man of birth, was highly dangerous; the air and manner accorded with the dress, and there was something not unfamiliar in the voice which asked, 'Is the citizen Alain here?' adding, as she evidently did not recognise the name by which Alain had been known since 'de' and 'St.' alike fell under a ban, 'the Chevalier, I would say.'

'No, monsieur,' answered the startled Edmée.

'This girl is lying,' was the new-comer's secret comment, as his keen, light-grey eyes noted her changing colour.

'That is unfortunate, mademoiselle, for I am a near relation come to see him on business very important to him. Has he been long gone?'

'Has he been here then, monsieur?'

'But that is what I desire to know, and I imagine that you can answer the question better than I.'

'I do not know you, monsieur.'

'True,' he answered, smiling at the naïve answer which unconsciously admitted the fact it sought to hide. 'I am called Pelven. Ask your mistress'—he gave her a doubtful, uncertain glance—'if she will see me.'

'Monsieur will excuse me if I shut the grille,' said Edmée, and she secured it before she went away, leaving De Pelven in the street. There was no time to deliberate over his message, which greatly troubled Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

'De Pelven here! De Pelven! what can have brought him? Yes, fetch him instantly. Alain spoke of him as acting a friendly part; but yet—make haste, child; let me hear what this means.'

She showed no sign of emotion, however, when M. de Pelven entered, bowing with grave courtesy as he said, 'My cousin, it is many years since we met; may I hope that you still remember me?'

'Certainly I do; you are welcome, monsieur, though I little expected to see you in our quiet town, when there are such stirring scenes in Paris, where you play such a successful part.'

'Do I owe this kind report to the Chevalier, my cousin?' asked De Pelven, accepting the compliment with a bow and smile, as if spoken in all good faith.

‘My nephew? I should have supposed that you knew as little of his movements as I.’

‘I confess to you, dear mademoiselle, that one of my objects in coming here was to find him. It is of the utmost importance that I should, and that at once.’

‘But he is not here.’

‘Ah, that is most unfortunate,’ said De Pelven, with a glance at once so penetrating and rapid that, while it scrutinised her face closely, even a watchful observer would not have noticed it. ‘I will be frank with you—’

‘Then I know he is trying to deceive me,’ muttered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to herself.

‘You must at least be aware of his resolution to leave France, less, as I know well, on account of any danger than to satisfy his father, whose mind, it seems, threatened to give way under the risks he thought he ran, and the death of the Vicomte strengthened this this—’

‘Delusion?’

‘Delusion, then, or fear, and there was truth enough in it to make me desirous of helping them to leave France.’

‘Yet, as I hear, it is so dangerous to help anyone out of the way of losing his head, that you yourself must have run considerable risk, monsieur?’

‘Even if it were so, mademoiselle, I was bound to do it; I am the next heir to Monsieur le Comte and the Chevalier,’ answered De Pelven with a look and tone which made Mademoiselle de St. Aignan say to herself, ‘That sounds true that is well said after all, I know nothing against him except his politics.’ ‘Well, cousin,’ and the increase of friendliness in her manner was apparent, ‘after that?’

‘After that, mademoiselle, being provided with papers, they left Paris—unexpectedly. You know my opinions, and will understand that I had been distinctly assured that neither Monsieur le Comte nor his son would use this opportunity to conspire against the Republic, nor convey communications to any refugees.’

‘That was but fair.’

‘It was but fair—precisely, but, unfortunately, the conditions were not carried out. A plot has been discovered in Paris, one of many which have been detected of late—to liberate the Queen—I will not offend you by refusing her that title—’

‘Do not speak to me of her, monsieur! When I think of what she has undergone, I cannot answer for myself! I am ashamed that I belong to the country and the nation who have insulted her as a queen and tortured her as a woman!’

‘In spite of all precautions, letters have been obtained, signed by this poor lady, to her own family, and to certain Royalists, now in exile—they were confided to Monsieur le Comte and his son.’

‘Impossible, monsieur; I tell you it is impossible!’

‘Alas, mademoiselle, it is precisely the impossible which is most often true. There is no doubt about it. Had these gentlemen not quitted Paris earlier than I was led to expect, we should know more.’

M. de Pelven’s voice had never altered from its calm and level tone, and only at these last words did a momentary spark kindle in his grey eyes. It was quenched in an instant, but had Mademoiselle de St. Aignan seen that look of vindictive and deadly hatred, she would have needed no further revelation of his feelings, but she was overwhelmed with consternation.

‘You are sure?—you cannot be mistaken?’ she asked, with the shame and anger of an honourable woman, who feels family disgrace as if it were her own. ‘It must be possible, then; my brother must have held that his duty as a Royalist was superior to any he could owe Republicans, but Alain at least had no share in it; Alain knew nothing whatever my brother did!’

A smile, not a pleasant one, crossed the lips of M. de Pelven.

‘I should be more assured of that if I could hear it from himself.’

‘I wish you could! I wish you could!’ Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had forgotten all danger to Alain in the regret that he was not there to clear himself. ‘But he is not here—I never thought to regret that he was out of France. I do not know where he may be, but not here.’

M. de Pelven slightly shrugged his shoulders; he did not believe a word.

‘You doubt me, my cousin,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, recovering something of her usual calm manner, as she saw the gesture. ‘You have a right to doubt us all, but can you suppose that I should hesitate where my nephew’s

honour is concerned? If I knew where he was, as things stand, I should tell you at once.'

'I never presumed to suppose you a party to this plot, mademoiselle, though your nephew has turned suspicion on you by coming here.'

'Why do you suppose he came here?' with an impulse to own as little as possible, for under the indignant conviction that the charge was true, at least as far as it concerned her brother, she felt great doubt and distrust of his accuser.

'Dear lady, what is the use of denying what I have positive proof of?'

He took out a pocket-book and carefully and deliberately extracted a scrap of paper in her own handwriting, which he held to her.

'Yes, it is my writing; I wrote lately to my nephew.'

'And he replied by coming here. He arrived the day before yesterday.'

'On my honour he did not,' she answered, perceiving at once that he knew nothing of the journey to St. Aignan.

'I must believe you,' he replied courteously.

'Only you do not,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with impatience; 'well then, since it can do no harm, as far as I can see—my nephew came here; came last night, stayed barely an hour, and left me at dawn, to join his father, who, you say, had already crossed the frontier. I know no more. What you tell me of the Comte utterly perplexes me.'

'Last night, and left you at dawn,' said De Pelven, meeting the clear blue eyes raised full to his with a thoughtful gaze, while he said to himself, 'It has the ring of truth, yet I fully believed him here in the house—the girl's face said so—ah! the girl,' and the perception that he could learn what he would from Edmée seemed to clear the path for him. Up to this time he had been a singularly successful man, as he counted success, a politician and a plotter for the pure pleasure of using men and circumstances as he chose, with remarkable penetration and foresight, which seemed to command the future and enable him to steer in the most troubled seas, and a freedom from convictions or conscience which gave him an enormous advantage over those wedded to a principle or a party. It was his study that as few as possible should know how many threads he held in his hands, or how great a power he possessed. He made no affectation

of ultra-Republicanism, yet he was in the confidence of all the Jacobin leaders, and did not fear to extend protection to Royalists and Moderates whom it suited him to help. He had spoken the exact truth as to his feelings towards the St. Aignans; their death could bring no advantage to him except that he would have a claim on their estates, which he did not desire, and his pride forbade him to let them perish and then profit by their death. But now to find himself endangered by the aid which he had given, cheated, laughed at, awoke such feelings as only a man of De Pelven's nature could experience. The hostility of such a man could only be deadly. The knowledge of the plot in which the Comte de St. Aignan, if not his son, was implicated, was confined to one or two besides himself, and none but he knew of the existence of that scrap of paper left on the floor of Alain's room, a fragment of a letter supposed to be destroyed, in which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had given him directions how to come to her—a harmless letter enough, even if the whole had been seized, but at this juncture more than enough to cost her life. De Pelven had visited Alain's rooms on the first intelligence of the conspiracy; found him gone, and, narrowly scrutinising all that could give a clue to his movements, discovered the fragment of paper. He at once assumed that the journey to St. Aignan had been mentioned merely as a blind, and that Mortemart was his real destination, probably to concert with his aunt means of transmitting answers to the papers which he carried out of France with him. The unhappy Marie Antoinette was still alive, a close prisoner, deprived of her son, and an unceasing object of suspicion and hatred to the ultra-Republicans. Desperate attempts to rescue her within the kingdom, and appeals to foreign powers without, were ceaseless, and it was in one of these that De Pelven believed the St. Aignans to be concerned. It was the policy of the Jacobins to use the discovery of such a plot, real or pretended, to incense the mob yet more against the Queen, but silence had been kept on this, with the hope of learning more. His prompt enquiries on the frontier had assured him that M. de St. Aignan had passed it, alone; Alain therefore, he argued, must still be in France, almost certainly at Mortemart, and he, at least, might be made to pay for his partial success in hoodwinking De Pelven, who, as he thought it over, could not but smile

with a cold wonder and disdain as he thought of the Comte or his son venturing to pit themselves against *him*. But the smile was a dangerous one. He had not often been deceived before, and he thought it would hardly happen to him again, forgetting that the acutest man is not secure against being self-deceived. And his preconceived view misled him when, practised as he was in distinguishing truth from falsehood, he could not make up his mind to trust what Mademoiselle de St. Aignan said, and reverted to his first belief that Alain was in Mortemart. To remain there himself was absolutely necessary, for even if Alain were gone, he would doubtless try to communicate with his aunt, unaware that the conspiracy was discovered, and thus its extent and his whereabouts might be learned ; or else she would try to let him know what she had just learned. De Pelven had rapidly reviewed the state of things before he replied to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's last words. ' So best, dear lady ; there is no more to be said. I must leave you now to see the local authorities on a matter of business which may detain me some days here—there is a small property on sale in this neighbourhood.'

' Lousnières ?'

' Exactly,' he answered, having spoken with a tolerable certainty that there must be either Church lands, or some *bien d'émigré*, in the market. ' I shall hope to be allowed to see you again.'

' You will allow me to offer you hospitality, unless there is danger for even you in accepting it from an aristocrat ?' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with reluctance born of her instinctive distrust, mingled oddly with the consciousness of having no servant whatever. He could hardly fail to misinterpret her hesitation.

' You are too good ! If, indeed, it did not inconvenience you—perhaps, too, my presence might be some protection. You have not been annoyed in any way ?'

' Not actually, though I have had more than one domiciliary visit, and strong admonitions to remember that I was a suspicious character. All that is a thing of course, but truly your society would be a boon, for I feel my isolation much ; one's oldest acquaintance look shyly on one, or have fled. No one ventures near friend or relation now ; every-one's chief desire is to be forgotten.'

'I gratefully accept, then. There is nothing that I can do for your security or comfort?'

'But indeed there is!' exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, struck by a sudden idea. 'I have here a young girl who has come to me without papers, being homeless since her mother's late death, and knowing nothing of such matters as permits. My old Nanon took fright at once at such a dangerous guest, and left me, and we have been debating ever since how to procure permission for the child to remain.'

'The girl who opened the door to me? I will settle that.'

'Thanks, my cousin,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with sincere gratitude. 'The poor child put me in a serious difficulty, but what could I do? Pray assure Monsieur le Maire that there is no danger of her conspiring against the nation, which, by-the-by, seems as susceptible as a *grande dame's* nerves to the most distant idea of danger!'

'It is difficult to say where conspiracy does not lurk now, my cousin, but I will answer for this child on the strength of your word; you shall not accuse me twice in one day of not believing it. Where does she come from?'

'St. Aignan. She is called Edmée Leroux, a girl of sixteen, I think.'

'And she is here—since when?'

'Only since this morning.'

'Ah!' The date seemed important to De Pelven.

'Yes, my poor old Nanon let her in, but as soon as she heard the story, she let herself out much more rapidly.'

'I can understand that. Let me tell you there was real peril, dear cousin, but now Nanon need not fear to return.'

'No, no,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with a comic expression of deprecation. 'I do not need her, and I need not tell you that, for many reasons, one is glad to have as few servants as possible. It is so tempting to prove oneself a good patriot by denouncing a master who is too economical, or a little hasty, or who forgets that servants are masters now-a-days, and must be treated as such. Or else some speech only half heard, and not at all understood, is repeated.'

No, Nanon shall stay in her own home, or rather that given by her grandson, a barber in the town.'

'Then if I need a barber I will propitiate Nanon's grandson by calling in his services. The perruquiers and painters

of coats-of-arms, and so forth, are some of the bitterest of the democrats.'

'Yes, having driven away their employers, they are furious against the *émigrés*, who have deprived them of bread! But this Achille Moustier is a worthy fellow enough, I believe.'

'Adieu, then, for the moment, dear lady; when I return, if indeed I may quarter myself on you, I shall hope to have arranged this little matter of Mademoiselle Edmée.'

Such a promise would have almost secured him a welcome, even had Mademoiselle de St. Aignan been more strongly prejudiced against him than she was, and the prospect of having a man of her own rank, accustomed to the great world, to talk with, was extremely welcome. She called Edmée to tell her of their unexpected guest, and the girl said eagerly, 'You have had good news, mademoiselle, I read it in your face.'

'No, far from that,' answered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, half ashamed of her good spirits when thus made aware of them. 'Bad enough, my child, but I cannot mend them by weeping over them.' She looked troubled enough for a moment, as she thought of her brother's name mixed up in double-dealing, and her nephew no one knew where, but rallied quickly. 'But this De Pelven—whatever his views, one sees he is a gentleman, and it is undoubtedly agreeable to be treated again as a lady, and meet someone who knows how to converse. We will have a game of piquet this evening. Whatever may happen to-morrow, it will be all the easier to bear that I have enjoyed to-day. What did you think of him, *petite*?'

'He seemed old—much older than Monsieur le Chevalier.'

'So he is—twenty years older, I imagine. No, a face like that—carved out of yellow ivory—would not take your fancy, child; but I have heard that few women can resist De Pelven. However, that is not talk for a child like you.'

'I am glad he will come again,' said Edmée.

She had cause of gratitude to M. de Pelven, as it seemed, for after a conference with the maire and the notary of Mortemart, a formal permission was made out and given to him for her residence in the town. He had letters and papers with him which made him an all-important person in their eyes, and he told them just enough to let them feel that

unless he were aided to their utmost, and left to act with entire freedom, Mortemart would be in danger of ranking as a very unpatriotic place, a danger not to be lightly encountered. He even found his way to the shop of Achille Moustier, for, as he afterwards observed to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, there was no one so small but he might sting some day, and propitiated both him and old Nanon, who found it not only quite possible to hear the Parisian customer's voice, but readily gave a full and eloquent account of her consternation at Edmée's arrival that morning. De Pelven gathered no more from it than he had already heard, but he felt persuaded that in some way or other this girl must be connected with the movements, of the man who had for the moment escaped him. It crossed his mind to go to St. Aignan and make enquiries there, but he rejected the idea; it was not the past, but the future, which concerned him; and by leaving Mortemart, he left the two, through whom he hoped to gain a clue, unwatched.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM SCYLLA TO CHARYBDIS.

IF Mademoiselle de St. Aignan enjoyed resuming some of her old sociable habits, Edmée had at least equal delight in listening to the conversation of M. de Pelven, a master of the agreeable talk which then was a necessary accomplishment to a man of the world. Before the end of the first evening she would have been astonished had anyone reminded her of her first impression of him; she no longer thought of him as a shallow, middle-aged man, but only felt that no one so fascinating had ever crossed her dreams. Without absolutely addressing himself to her, he never failed by a pleasant word or look to include her in the conversation, and she listened entranced to revelations of a new, yet half-divined world, as he and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan talked together, avoiding with exquisite tact all subjects that could jar too rudely, though often splintering lances briskly, for Mademoiselle de

St. Aignan had a natural pugnacity which led her to enjoy a keen encounter of wits. On the darker and stormier subjects of the day they did not touch. 'I will ask for no one,' she had said, 'I dare not. I never look at a newspaper now for fear of what I may learn from it. But talk to me of all our friends of whom you have anything pleasant to say.'

Edmée felt as if she were now really entering that well-bred world, of which her visits to the château, as the favourite and godchild of its mistress, had enabled her to see just enough to make her ardently desire to know more. She had an instinctive and keen love of all that was beautiful, or refined, which was in itself a danger for a girl of her class, and it only existed for her in this aristocratic world which was already almost swept away by such a tempest as the world had never seen since the mighty Roman empire fell under the onslaught of the barbarians. She felt a thrill of pleasure when M. de Pelven casually remarked that there were arrangements to be made before he could purchase Lousnières which would detain him much longer than he expected, and she glanced anxiously towards Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, anticipating her ready answer that the longer he stayed the better she should be pleased.

'I disapprove of you,' his hostess added, with laughing candour, 'and I daresay, if I knew all, I should disapprove a great deal more, but I am very glad to see you for all that.'

So M. de Pelven stayed on, and though he was never with the two ladies except of an evening, having affairs of his own which employed him sometimes in the town, sometimes in the two rooms which had been allotted to him, or rather, which he had chosen when the whole second-floor was put at his disposal, he made a very agreeable variety in their daily lives, and speedily gained a very good idea of the habits of his hostess and her companion, and it might have been safely asserted that they never went out or in without his being aware of the fact. However, they seldom did leave the house, unless when Edmée unwillingly went to buy such supplies as were absolutely necessary for housekeeping, or wandered in the neglected garden. She never ventured into the streets if she could help it, shrinking from the curious eyes turned upon her as a stranger, and feeling that she had an enemy in old Nanon, who unreasonably enough considered that it was thanks to her she had lost a comfortable place. However, to

keep perceptibly out of sight, or to spend too little money, would have laid both herself and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan open to the charge of want of patriotism ; Edmée dared not risk that, but she always had to nerve herself by a strong effort before she could force herself to go out to the market.

She thought that there must have been a presentiment of danger in this natural reluctance when, a few days after the arrival of M. de Pelven, she saw the diligence coming through the place, and barely had time to shrink behind a great tree under which a group of expectant idlers sat before the driver had pulled up his horses, calling for a relay, and Edmée from her shelter saw one of the passengers starting up in his place to address the little crowd which had gathered, eager for news. Too well she knew voice and face, and the very phrases which the orator uttered, nay, even his ragged coat and red cap *à la Rolande* were horribly familiar. It was Letumier, the man for whose wife she had been destined by her father. 'Hear me, friends and brothers,' he was saying, 'let us burn all the libraries and all antiquities, and have no guide but ourselves ; let us cut off the heads of all the deputies who have not voted according to our principles, banish or imprison all the gentry, and guillotine the Baker's wife as we have done the Baker !'

Edmée was too dizzy to know how his speech was received ; what had brought him here ? was he seeking her ? In such alarm that her limbs would hardly move, she hurried into the nearest shop, without noticing which, until a shrill old voice startled her senses back again, and she found herself in the 'boutique' of Achille Moustier, with Nanon gesticulating at her from a corner behind the counter, and demanding to know what had brought them the honour of so distinguished a customer.

'Hush, hush, grandmother, all customers are welcome, especially such as the citoyenne,' interposed Achille, who had been standing on his threshold, looking out at the diligence, when Edmée stumbled blindly past him. 'What can I offer—but thou art ill, citoyenne, sit down then, sit down I pray thee ; the sun was too hot, no doubt ; I saw thee stagger in crossing the street.'

'Bah ! bah ! as if huzzies of her age suffered from the sun !' muttered old Nanon, 'did I ever feel it when I was a girl ? and we *had* sun *then* ; I tell thee nobody knows now

what heat is—art thou such a ninny as not to understand that all she desired was an excuse for coming in here, when there was a young man behind the counter! I know the ways of these jades!’

‘Yes, yes, little grandmother, you were young once, you see! Do not mind the old woman, *citoyenne*,’ added Achille, with a good-humoured look at old Nanon, and evidently flattered by her explanation of the conduct of poor Edmée, who was still too much terrified to be embarrassed.

‘If I might stay a few moments,’ she murmured.

‘But yes! as many as you will. I am too much honoured! Ah, my shop used to be more frequented once, but there! things are changed, and no doubt for the better. The *citoyenne* is looking at that hair? a beautiful colour, is it not? Hair is cheap now, and I have laid in a good stock; but times change. I used to buy all that the nuns had to sell at the convent yonder; but now there is such a supply from the prisons that it is quite a drug in the market.’

‘Then that hair,’ began Edmée, looking at it with a sort of fascination—

Achille politely finished her sentence for her. ‘Yes, *citoyenne*, that, and that which you see yonder—in fact all in the window, belonged to aristocrats; it is of the best quality; there is something so fine about it that an experienced hand would recognise it at once—feel it, *citoyenne*.’

‘How can you ask me!’ exclaimed Edmée, drawing back with a shudder, which made the hair-dresser stand staring at her with wonder, while Nanon exclaimed venomously:

‘Ah, ah, my son, dost thou not see that our little aristocrat is grieved that so many of her friends have been shaved with the national razor? Perhaps she thinks that some day her own hair may appear in the shop window, eh, eh!’

‘I should never have had any more beautiful,’ said the polite Achille, looking critically at the abundant and glossy tresses wound round Edmée’s head, and quite unaware how ghastly his compliment sounded. ‘Let me show you how like yours is to that of the Baronne de Vieuville’s; I can lay my hand on it in a minute. I always ticket the hair, if possible, for I have customers who will gladly pay more for such as belonged to a great lady. Ah, the diligence goes on; they seem to have a famous orator on it to-day. Did the *citoyenne* hear his speech?’

‘Yes,’ said Edmée, with a deep breath of relief, as she saw the preparations for departure, and the loud clack of the whip was music in her ears. No doubt Letumier was on his way to Lyons or Paris, and had no thought of such an insignificant thing as herself. ‘Thank you for allowing me to rest, citizen Achille; adieu, mère Nanon,’ with a timid courtesy to the old woman, whose little eyes followed her maliciously, while she called after her :

‘We will not fail to keep a good place for your hair, *ma petite*!’

It was no wonder that Edmée looked so white as she came into Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s house that M. de Pelven, coming down the broad oak staircase, stopped and asked with solicitude what was amiss.

‘Oh, nothing, nothing, monsieur! Oh, how I wish I need never go beyond the courtyard.’

‘You have been frightened? Poor little one, sit down here and tell me.’

‘Indeed it is nothing, only old Nanon and her grandson talked so horribly, and—and—I saw someone of whom I was afraid,’ she faltered, with a feeling that if De Pelven knew her fears he could protect her.

‘An old acquaintance?’

‘Yes, monsieur, a man who leads all the Jacobins in our part; you may know his name.’

‘There are so many of that species now, my child!’

‘Yes, no doubt; then perhaps he is not so terrible as I thought; but he seemed so to us all, and I saw him on the diligence.’

‘He must be indeed terrible if the mere sight of him on the diligence could upset you thus. Are all Republicans equally dreadful in your eyes?’

‘Oh, monsieur, it was not only that, he. I ’

‘Ah, he had a special interest in you? Perhaps you even fled here to be out of his way?’

Edmée was silent.

‘I begin to understand now,’ said M. de Pelven, with a smile, ‘and you thought he had come back to seek you? It is far more likely that he goes to seek another mistress—fame—in Paris.’

‘Yes, I think so too now.’

‘Your father, then, favoured him?’

‘He did, monsieur; but ask me nothing of those days. I would gladly die if so I could be sure of forgetting them.’

De Pelven looked at her, struck by the tone, though she had spoken very low.

‘You are among friends now,’ he said, reassuringly.

‘Friends, oh yes,’ she answered with a pretty smile and blush of gratitude.

De Pelven knew that he was included in the number. He took her hand and pressed it. ‘I hear my cousin coming,’ he said. ‘You must not meet her with such white looks as you had a few moments ago. My cousin, this poor child has been frightened by a *revenant* from St. Aignan.’

‘What is this? what are you two consulting about?’ demanded Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, while De Pelven was secretly congratulating himself that the tap of her high-heeled shoes was sure always to give full notice of her approach. Edmée told her what had alarmed her, but it was only later, when, straying into the garden, as she had a habit of doing, she encountered De Pelven there, that she spoke of the conversation in the hair-dresser’s shop. He smiled and frowned.

‘It would be a pity,’ he murmured to himself, looking at the young head, with its wealth of shining hair, and the thought crossed him that, though he should use her as a means of forwarding his plans, he should not willingly let her come to harm. He had no pleasure in cruelty, though he would have unhesitatingly sacrificed anyone who stood in his way; but he felt that he would rather make victims of half-a-dozen women of his own class than this village girl, whose purity and innocence gave him the interest of a new study, and who was something of an enigma to him. He liked to see the shy eyes raised smilingly to his, and feel that though mistrustful she trusted him. He felt sure that she had a history in the background, and it amused and occupied him to find it out. It was with a certain wondering satisfaction that he found himself capable of such feeling. He had grown weary of most things in the forty years of his life, and it was an agreeable surprise which almost made him grateful to the girl that he found himself capable of being thus moved. It did not soften his feelings towards Alain to believe that Edmée was in his confidence. ‘It must be so,’ he would say to himself, seeking to disentangle the web; ‘her looks betray her whenever he is named, yet if ever I read a

woman's looks there is no love in them. She baffles me. If she would pretend to know nothing, I could deal with her ; but " Ask me nothing ; I only want to forget," that defeats me. Time goes by, too. Well, De Pelven is hardly to be baffled by a girl !'

It seemed a hopeful sign that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan evidently grew uneasy at not hearing from her nephew. The accusation of dishonourable conduct rankled in her mind, and she wanted as much to obtain an opportunity of bidding him deny it, as to know him in safety. She had no fears for her brother, having a strong though only half-acknowledged conviction that he was one of those useless people in the world whose lives, being of no importance, last interminably ; but she thought Alain's of very great consequence, and therefore much less safe, a view which perhaps the general course of events somewhat justifies. It could not, however, surprise her that she heard nothing. Communication even with friends in France was very hazardous, as no letter sent by post was safe from inspection, and a sharp watch was kept on all sent by private hand. She had had letters in the lining of dresses, in a pie, in a pair of slippers, so well concealed that it had cost her much time and pains to discover them, and she had found a truly feminine pleasure in eluding the Argus eyes of the powers that were ; but she could not see how any message from beyond the frontier was to be conveyed. To have received even the most innocent-looking packet from Switzerland or Belgium would have been highly dangerous. She was too much preoccupied with this care to think much of Edmée or De Pelven, and, woman of the world though she was, the idea that either might be attracted by the other never crossed her mind, and she had just so much reluctance to admit her nephew to be irrevocably bound as to be unwilling to tell the story of his marriage to De Pelven, especially with the consciousness that he would smile to scorn the notion that it was at least binding in honour. She had grown very fond of Edmée, but just now De Pelven embodied for her ' the world's dread laugh,' and she told herself that there was no need to mention the matter, and did not see that one of the most attractive men in France was doing his best to win a girl with no defence but her sense of honour and her pure heart, and a girl, moreover, bound to another whom she did not love, and

knew to be indifferent to her. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was blind to it all, as those most nearly concerned in tragedies *are* blind, until the last moment—sometimes even after that supreme instant. And Edmée was blind too, and there was no one to warn her to draw back while it was time. She only knew that somehow happiness had come into her life, and that it was no longer difficult not to regret that she had not died with her baby-brothers, before she had any bitter memories. The spring of inward gladness gave colour to the palé cheeks and a lustre to the eyes, which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan noticed with pleasure; more than once she said to De Pelven, ‘That child grows charming; I saw no signs of it when she first came, but look at her now—she has the Berrichonne beauty, but she will always be much too slight for a true Berrichonne—they have the large English frame, you know. I always say that my nephew has an English look with him, though, to be sure, no Englishman ever had his distinguished air!’

De Pelven smiled quietly. He read the secret of Edmée’s brightening looks as neither she nor Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ABBÉ GÉRUSEZ.

‘I CANNOT see how I *am* to hear from my nephew,’ began Mademoiselle de St. Aignan suddenly, as she put down her cards and looked at M. de Pelven, who was her adversary at piquet; but then, recollecting that she had not told Edmée anything of the imputation which weighed on her mind, she stopped abruptly, and betrayed her perturbation by putting down a wrong card, which threw all the chances of the game into her opponent’s hands. Being an ardent piquet-player, this untoward accident for the moment banished everything else from her mind; but some instinct told Edmée that her presence was a restraint. She stepped out of the room, and betook herself to the garden, though it was late, and there had been rain enough in the morning to make the walks

damp. She was happy, happy enough to find her solitary wandering, filled with vague musings, very pleasant, even when twilight made the neglected walks, shaded by thick hornbeam hedges, chill and gloomy, and the comparative liberty of her present life was in itself a spring of pleasure; but she stood still, with a great start, as she saw the little door leading down to the river cautiously moved, and a man's head appear at the opening. Her presence did not seem to scare him as his did her, for he came through the door and closed it behind him. He wore a peasant's dress, and seemed to have waded through the stream, to judge by his dripping condition. Edmée stood still in some alarm, but was reassured by a look into the face, very careworn and haggard, but that of a kind elderly man, by no means formidable.

'My child, is your name St. Aignan?' he asked, in a low voice.

'No, monsieur; Mademoiselle is in the house; do you want her?'

'I have a message to you both, for surely I cannot be mistaken; it is the wife of the Chevalier de St. Aignan to whom I speak?'

'But, monsieur!' Edmée gazed at him in breathless consternation.

'Nay, you need not be afraid of me, my daughter,' he said, with a kind smile, only partially comprehending her dismay. 'I am the Abbé Gérusez, the priest of Les Halliers;' then, seeing that this told her nothing, he smiled again, and shook his head with compunction. 'Ah, I see you have never heard of me—how should you? It is a timely humiliation. Where will not vanity lurk!'

'A priest! Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé, is it safe for you to be here?'

'Safe, my poor child! Where can it be safe for anyone, above all a priest, now? But let me give you your message; the Chevalier has escaped into Switzerland, and found his father already there. You must not ask me how I know this; it might bring others into danger. All that concerns you is that he was exceedingly anxious that his aunt and wife should know this, even if he cannot communicate again with them.'

"His wife!" Surely he did not call me that,' Edmée murmured, turning very pale.

‘Undoubtedly, my child. Are you not, then, his wife?’

‘Yes—no—you would not think so. Oh, father! may I confess to you? But, no, it might be too dangerous if you lingered. We are not alone in the house; a relation of Mademoiselle’s is here, who might come into the garden, and though, of course, he would not betray you——’

‘Would he not, my poor little one? You answer boldly for this Pelven, a dangerous man, as I hear; a dangerous, bad man.’

‘Oh no, father, you are misinformed!’ cried Edmée, blushing rosy-red with eagerness and displeasure; ‘he has protected us, though he is a Republican; he is most kind and good.’

‘Poor child!’ was the priest’s answer, ‘more dangerous to you than me, perhaps. I would certainly hear your confession, but I am urgently wanted elsewhere; there is a dying woman with an unbaptised babe to whom I must go at once, but I will return to-morrow, at this hour, if I live.’

‘Oh, risk nothing for me, Monsieur l’Abbé! I ought not to ask it.’

‘Why not for you as well as for others? I have not stayed for the sake of one, but of all my flock—or rather, I have come back for them. Alas! my child, you must not think too well of me; at the first I fled like a hireling,’ said the priest, colouring deeply, ‘but my conscience would not let me rest, and I came back to my people; they need a shepherd sorely. The very danger all around us tempts men to forget God.’

‘Does it, father?’

‘You wonder, my child, but so it is. Those who loved Him in better times cling faster to Him now, but as for the rest.

One cannot always live at full stretch; one grows used to terror and danger, and one thrusts away the thought and grows reckless. And men’s hearts fail them when their prayers fall to the ground unanswered, and they knock, but the door is not opened,’ said the priest, with an irrepressible sigh, adding after a moment, almost inaudibly, ‘“Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” Farewell, my daughter, till to-morrow, if God wills it. Thank Mademoiselle de St. Aignan for her last kind help to my people.’

‘You know her, then!’ said Edmée, astonished. He answered only by a smile, but moved back to lay his hand

on her head and bless her. She knelt down in great agitation, and did not rise until the garden-gate had closed behind him; then sprang up and fled indoors; she would have passed M. de Pelven, without seeing him, but for his detaining hand, and gentle, 'I was sent by my cousin to seek you. Ah! you are the bearer of important news?'

'Monsieur! how do you know that?'

'Parbleu! it is not difficult to see. Reassure me at least as to the Chevalier's safety.'

'Yes; he is safe, he is in Switzerland. Let me go to Mademoiselle.'

'In Switzerland!' murmured De Pelven, much surprised. 'Out of reach, then, at least for the moment. But who brought the news?'

He might have questioned Edmée, but it was more congenial to his nature to discover it in a less direct way. He went down into the garden, looking attentively at the walks, damp with recent rain. They scarcely betrayed where Edmée's girlish step had passed, but near the little door footprints were deeply marked on them.

'A man's foot, not a young one's; he had a stick and leant on it—a countryman's shoe, but that tells nothing,' De Pelven said to himself, eyeing the traces. 'Ha! what happened here? she must have knelt down. It was a priest, *ma foi!* there is sure to be a woman and a priest in all plots. It must be that Abbé from Les Halliers, whom they cannot get hold of—So he is mixed up with it! well, he will come again.'

Meanwhile Edmée had joined Mademoiselle de St. Aignan and told her that Alain was in safety. She wondered to see the first flash of joy on his aunt's face overshadowed almost immediately. 'But who brought the news, child?' she asked impetuously. 'How could you let him go? It is absolutely necessary that I send the Chevalier a message.'

'I do not know, mademoiselle; it was a priest, a kind man—the Abbé Gérusez I think he called himself.'

'Ah, the good Abbé! There is a man who might make us all say, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian"—nay, quite, for it must be a great faith which enables a timid man such as he to choose the life of a hunted beast, now in the woods, now in some hut, always in the utmost danger. I do not love the priests overmuch, as you know—yes, yes, *p. tite*, I have seen you wince and sigh over my depravity, but

it is the truth—yet when I see a man like the curé of Les Halliers, I think . . . a great many things,’ she concluded with a laugh. ‘Be sure to keep him if you see him again.’

Edmée could never tell how far the sceptical tone habitual to her hostess was assumed or real. It troubled her deeply, as a flaw in a precious stone, and set a certain barrier between them. She could not bring herself to say that she hoped to see and confess to the Abbé the next evening, but went away to her own room, and tried to prepare herself for this confession. It was long since she had had such an opportunity, and she felt with keen pain how unlike her tale would be to the simple, girlish avowals of two years before. That message from Alain kept ringing in her ears: ‘his wife!’ he had called her so openly, and she was forced to perceive that there was some sort of a bond between them which could only be broken by mutual consent. And if so—where had she been drifting? She covered her face in a transport of pain and shame, and then a sharp pang of resentment against Mademoiselle de St. Aignan shot through her heart. Why had she not spoken frankly of her as the Chevalier’s wife, since she held her so; why had she put her in this false position with regard to—others? Even to herself she did not at first say any name. ‘Send me help—oh, no matter how, but send me help!’ was the cry of her heart as she sat in the deep window-seat of her bedroom through long hours of the night—hours in which her childhood died—and faced her position and her danger. ‘Anyhow—in any way—only let me be helped!’ she implored, looking up to the far off, silent sky, with voiceless intensity of supplication. ‘Monsieur l’Abbé came at the right time,’ she said to herself at last, worn out into calmness, and with a sense that she had not prayed in vain. ‘He will advise me. If I belong to the St. Aignans, they shall never blush for me—but oh, mother, mother!’

Her promise to her mother was costing her more than she could have dreamed possible. ‘*He* must know,’ she added presently, but it was only with the innocent belief that it would be safer for herself were De Pelven informed of her position; she had learned what he was to her, but the discovery was as yet too absorbing for any thought of what she might be to him; he seemed too far off, too superior a being for that side of the question to present itself. ‘Yes—Monsieur l’Abbé was sent to me,’ and, comforted by that thought, she

lay down at last and slept. She woke with a new world of feelings in her heart, and it did not need the keen eye of De Pelven to see immediately what a change had come over her. 'She expects someone—the Chevalier? No, she said he was in Switzerland, and though she can be silent, she cannot lie,' he muttered, noting her closely. 'It will be well in any case to get hold of this go-between.' Edmée never discovered that he was watching her, yet she felt the strangest sense of being under surveillance. It had hitherto been the most natural thing in the world that she should go out and in as the fancy took her, but as the hour for her appointment came near she felt as if she dared not move, even though De Pelven, who had been absent all the morning, had only returned to go straight to his rooms, where he spent a good deal of time in writing. Once, when she had summoned courage to leave the room, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan called after her, and she started as if she had been shot; although it was but a request to fetch a *chauffepied*. She brought it, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan thanked her by a pat on the cheek. Its coldness startled her. 'Why, *petite*!' she exclaimed, 'it is you, not I, who need more warmth. What have you been doing? Sitting still all day over that lace-pillow! Fie, fie, you should go into the garden, and get your eyes rested. One would say you had stayed awake all night, only happily that never befalls children of your age!' added Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who, though twice Edmée's age, and more, never guessed that into the brief life of the girl had been crowded fears, and bitterness, and exquisite suffering such as her own had never even been tinged with. 'Leave that to older people, *petite*! Go then—unless it is too late?'

'Oh, no, no,' answered Edmée, inexpressibly thankful for the pretext to escape, and she slipped away in haste, and hurried to the end of the garden, her heart beating fast as she watched for the opening of the little door, and went over what she had to say to the Abbé. She waited long, with her eyes still fixed on the door, and her ears on the alert for every sound, waited until a sick sense of disappointment and doubt began to creep over her; a fear that something had delayed the priest. 'But he must come,' she exclaimed half aloud, looking up with reproachful, appealing eyes to the skies from whose depths she had seemed to feel an answer thrill the night before. They were grey now; cloudy and low; they did

not seem the same into which she had gazed with her soul in her eyes a few hours earlier. The unseen world had seemed so near in that conflict of feeling; help so certain. She shivered, and listened to the town clock striking slowly. She dared not linger any longer. 'He will not come!' she thought again, with such bitter disappointment as did not only come from the failure of her hope of confession; it seemed to her as if her gratitude for that certainty of help which had thrilled into her soul had been wasted, as if she had been mocked by a delusive promise, and that there was nothing to trust to. All was blankness to her. It was with utter depression that she went wearily away, and returned to the house, scarcely caring to remember that there was no reason why the Abbé Gérusez should not come another day.

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan sat reading, with her feet on the *chauffepied*; she looked up, and gave Edmée a friendly nod as she came in, and then went on with her book. She read a great deal, especially works by the Encyclopédistes. Just now she had in hand Malebranche's '*Recherche de la Vérité*.' She would not let Edmée read them, which indeed the girl had little inclination to do; but gave her '*Paradis Perdu*' instead, which, as it happened, suited her little better.

Edmée went and leant listlessly at the window, which looked across the court to the street, but her vague gaze sought nothing there. All the exhaustion of her sleepless night and tumult of feeling had come upon her; she looked like the spiritless stranger whom Alain had brought in the chill dawn into the little salon on the ground-floor rather than the Edmée who had of late moved lightly about the house where she had found a home. She stood at the window because she was too listless to move away, hardly thinking anything distinctly, and unobserved by Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who was interested by her book, and to whom Edmée's goings and comings were not especially important, although she had grown fonder of her guest than she yet knew. For some minutes Edmée had been dimly conscious of a noise without, which seemed to gather volume, and approach, and her heart gave a great leap of horror as all at once she became aware that these sounds were the yells of infuriated voices, the trampling of many feet—sounds ominous of ill, perhaps of death. Her exclamation startled Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who rose in alarm, and hurried to her side, just as the crowd

went by, a crowd composed of a few men and many women, shrieking, brandishing their clenched hands in the air, and heaping coarse insults on the passive figure whom they dragged along in their midst, whom Edmée had recognised even before Mademoiselle de St. Aignan exclaimed with consternation and deep regret, 'The Abbé Gérusez! Good heavens! he is a lost man!' They only saw him for a moment, as the throng rushed past, but even in that brief time Edmée noticed a woman, a wild fury, with her cap fallen back and her black locks all loose, snatch up a handful of mud from the street, and fling it into his face. He could not wipe it away, for his hands were bound, and a cruel laugh of triumph arose from the spectators. Their cries and shouts were audible long after the mob had gone by. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan turned, pale and shuddering, to speak to Edmée, but, to her surprise, found her gone unnoticed.

She had darted up to the second floor, into the apartment never before visited by her while De Pelven was there, though she took shy delight in arranging it in his absence.

'Monsieur!' she cried, appearing suddenly before him, while he looked up from his writing in smiling amazement. 'Monsieur! they have arrested the priest of Les Halliers. He is a dead man unless someone interfere at once, but you can save him.'

'I, my poor child? You greatly overrate my power,' said De Pelven, coldly. 'What can make you credit me with interest enough to save a priest in these days? I should simply risk my own head in vain.'

'No, no, that is not so; you are powerful, and oh, he is such a good man! he has given his life for his people, and you will not let him be murdered? I *know* you can save him,' Edmée cried, exasperated by his deprecating smile and shrug. 'Unless you had power, how could you have arranged my being here as you did? how would you dare to live under the roof of an aristocrat?'

'I have strained such poor interest as I have on behalf of my cousin,' said De Pelven, surprised at an argument which showed more shrewdness than he expected or liked. 'I can do no more, I assure you. And what is this priest to you, my pretty Edmée, that you plead so warmly for him!'

'A good man, monsieur; is not that enough? Some would think it enough to be worth risking something for!'

‘And, moreover, your means of communicating with the Chevalier?’ said De Pelven, fixing his eyes upon her; but he was not prepared for the instant change produced by his words. All the personal feelings which emotion had swept away returned on her like a flood; she turned red and pale, and stood dumb before him, and sudden passion blazed up in his eyes as, for once losing self-command, he exclaimed, ‘Do you mean to tell me you love St. Aignan?’

‘I I have scarcely seen him,’ she faltered out; ‘but I am his wife.’

‘His wife!’ For a moment De Pelven’s countenance changed as much as hers had done. *Blasé* man of the world as he was, those two words shook him so that he could not trust his voice to reply. It was with a sort of wonder at himself that he heard its husky tone as he said, after a pause, ‘This is news which may well surprise me a little. I should have thought, under the circumstances, that the Chevalier would have wished for two persons’ names on his passport.’

‘No, he could not tell—and besides let me tell you how it was, monsieur,’ said Edmée, gaining courage, and resolved to make all clear. ‘I tried to warn him of danger at St. Aignan; it was found out, and my home was closed to me. Then he married me.’

‘With the help of this priest, no doubt.’

‘No;’ Edmée’s colour flushed crimson. ‘Before the maire; and then he brought me here.’

‘Before the maire! And you do not love him? Is it possible that *you* hold that a marriage?’ cried De Pelven, with instant perception of the argument which would tell most with Edmée. ‘It is impossible, nor can he, my poor child.’

‘Alas! he does,’ she answered, utterly unconscious how much this short sentence betrayed to the eager ear which caught them.

‘And you?’

‘And I too.’

‘But this is folly! You will probably never meet again—do not believe those who say that in a few months all will settle down in France. Years will not see the *émigrés* return—and are you to sacrifice all your young life to an imaginary bond? are you never to listen to anyone who tells you he loves you as the Chevalier neither does nor could do?’

said De Pelven, drawing nearer, and taking her hands, while his glowing, melting gaze dwelt on the drooping face which coloured vividly under the look which she felt though she did not see, and his voice dwelt on her ear in the caressing and seductive tones which few women indeed had ever heard unmoved. 'Sweet one! do you not feel how cruel, how unreasonably unjust to others as well as yourself this would be? Look up; have you not guessed a little that there is some one whom you would drive to despair by such a thought?—that it is for your sake I linger here?'

'That does not make me free,' she answered, sighing deeply, and trying to withdraw her hands.

'But do you not see that, since you are but a stranger to the Chevalier, his purpose was answered when he found you a home, and that he cannot even wish to have a further claim upon you? In freeing yourself, you free him.'

'I do not know that he wishes it.'

'But if you did, my Edmée, if you did?'

'It would be different then, I suppose,' she said, while for an instant she lifted her shy, brightening eyes to the face bent over her, moved for once with strong and sincere emotion, which seemed to thrill through her; 'but we cannot know.'

'Nay, we can learn. This abbé, this Gérusez, he doubtless has means of communicating with the Chevalier—if he should undertake to assure you that St. Aignan desires to be free from this hasty bond, will you be content?'

Edmée stood thinking, as well as she could while her heart throbbed so fast. 'If—without a word as if I asked for release—the Chevalier declares it is his wish to break this tie—I wish it too.'

'And that is all you will say! Can you imagine that a man of honour would be the first to suggest it? *Allons donc!* you are in jest,' cried De Pelven, who knew that his hopes of success were but small if Alain were thus dealt with. 'It is an insult to suppose it!'

'But Monsieur l'Abbé can learn what he would wish—though, indeed, what *can* he wish but to escape from such a bond?' said Edmée, with burning shame and confusion. 'Let me only know clearly that it *is* his wish. That it must surely be possible to ascertain.'

De Pelven looked as if he were going to show her how

futile such scruples were, but a glance at Edmée's countenance made him change his mind. He postponed whatever he had been about to say, and turned it into, 'And you will leave me in suspense until who can say when?'

'I must.'

'Will you not even let me guess that you love me a little?' he asked, bending over her until his lips almost touched hers, and with a light of passion and triumph in his eyes which she did not see; but she hastily shrank away from him.

'No, I cannot, I will not. I should like you to think well of me,' she said, with a sweet pleading, lifting her eyes; and the frank, innocent look touched him so strangely that he could only inwardly laugh at his own folly, when he came to think of it later, and wonder what was the spell by which this girl contrived to bewitch him. All his various former experiences seemed idle and unreal beside this. He had made love often, sometimes for his pleasure, often as a thread in the web of political intrigues; but it had never absorbed him, never approached to possessing the interest which plots and counterplots and the study of the men around him had; but this new feeling threatened in his cool middle age to master him and make him its slave.

'If I told you what I think of you'—he said, but so gently as not to scare her, though she flushed and quivered at all that the tone implied. 'Well, that must wait. I will see this abbé, perhaps save him, too, for your sake.'

She thanked him by a look. He did not attempt to stop her as she turned away and went silently out of the room, but sat down to think, plan, and wonder with a derisive smile at himself. Edmée returned to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who did not marvel at the traces of agitation in her looks; she herself was still greatly shocked, but enquired with surprise where she had been. 'I thought Monsieur your cousin might do something for the good abbé,' was Edmée's answer.

'Ah! well thought of, but to interfere in behalf of a priest—dare he do so!'

'He says he will try.'

'That is well. I do not at all approve of his politics, though upon my word, it is rather difficult, now I come to think of it, to know what they are—he is too much of a gon-

tleman to obtrude them ; however, if we must have a Republican in the family, it is well to use him when he can help one. After all, *petite*, you look better than when you went out just now—you have quite a rosy colour ; you are like me, I imagine—any emotion, even pain, suits me better than a monotonous life. Yes, yes, as you say, I lead one dull enough just now, but when there is no choice I can endure a thing patiently. But I sometimes think I would rather be in all the dangers of Paris than vegetate safely here.’

CHAPTER X.


MÈRE CLAUDE.

MADemoiselle de St. Aignan repeated her observation as to peril in Paris being preferable to safety, buried alive *en province*, when De Pelven appeared at supper-time, and there was a momentary expression in his face as if what she said chimed in with some train of thought of his own, though he made no direct answer, and she began to speak of the sight which had shocked her in the afternoon, and remarked with approbation on his courage in proposing to interfere on the poor priest’s behalf, ‘as Edmée tells me you intend doing,’ she said. ‘The child had a happy thought when she flew to invoke your help.’

De Pelven smiled, and looked significantly at Edmée, who did not respond, for chill doubt was creeping over her of what the decision of the abbé, or Alain’s, would be. She never guessed that De Pelven was thinking to himself with disappointment, for which he derided himself, ‘She has told just enough to avert suspicion of course she has ! Why should I suppose her different to other women ? What is it that bewitches me in her ? I have seen a hundred more beautiful, a hundred more *spirituelle*—’ but just then Edmée looked up, and though he could not define the spell, and half chafed against it, half yielding with marvelling pleasure, he could not in any case deny that there it was, holding him in fine, invisible meshes, whose strength increased hourly.

Edmée had fancied that he would take measures in the priest's behalf that very evening, and was disappointed that he should stay as usual playing at piquet, persuading Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to sing to him, talking agreeably as on other occasions, though the various questions which he asked about the abbé showed her that his interest in him was awakened. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan knew enough to be able to give him information fully sufficient to enable him to settle on his plan of campaign; the abbé was a simple character, easily read by a less keen eye. 'Good!' reflected De Pelven, as he retired, with a gaily tender farewell to his cousin, and a look that conveyed volumes to Edmée, 'to-morrow I will see this man; his timid nature will have had time to realise his position, and I shall scarcely find it difficult to learn where the Chevalier is—' he set his teeth hard on his pale lips as he muttered the name, 'and if he should refuse if by chance he will not give the advice I want—there is no telling how women and priests will act—why, I can do without him.'

It was perfectly easy for a man in such repute with the local authorities as De Pelven to see any prisoner whom he chose, alone and whenever he liked, 'for the service of the nation.' There had been enough of the ineffectual plots and risings of the Royalist party, and of those whom the terrible condition of public affairs drove to their side, through the province, to alarm the patriots, and supply the prison, though one set after another had been drafted off to Lyons or Paris itself, when the capture was considered worthy of that dangerous honour. The convent opposite Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's house had lately served as a prison, and De Pelven had but a few hundred yards to go to see the abbé, after he had furnished himself with a permit, which he asked, with scrupulous deference to the chief in office, who on his side was fervent in his eagerness to forward the wishes of the deputy from Paris, who no doubt could make his fortune or have his head cut off, though sometimes the more vehement Jacobins expressed suspicions among themselves of the patriotism possible to a man of noble birth with a *De*, however carefully suppressed, to his name. He was absent for some time, Edmée observed, and needed no one to tell her where he had gone. It would have needed far more keen-sighted eyes than hers to read dissatisfaction in his face when he returned. She



was just going out, in the country costume which she always wore when she left the house, to her unwelcome duty of marketing, and they met in the courtyard.

‘You will not ask me how I have sped?’ was his greeting, with a smile.

‘But indeed I very much wish to know,’ she answered, meeting his eyes with the frank and fearless innocence which in fact was what chiefly fascinated him in her.

‘Well, better than I dared hope, my sweet one, though it was self-evident that to a priest such a tie as yours could seem no tie, but a sin. He undertakes to communicate with the Chevalier, but you must not expect a written consent from him; it is very difficult to convey papers, and most dangerous to be found the bearer of any. So be satisfied, my Edmée.’

‘I am,’ she murmured; ‘now let me go.’

‘What! you leave me now? and for this miserable marketing.’

‘Is it any reason because we are happy that Mademoiselle should not be hungry?’ she laughed, gay with joy and relief. ‘Only I shall not be very long gone, I think.’

There was joyousness in her very step as she passed out into the street; then she turned back so suddenly as to take De Pelven unawares as his eyes followed her, and started with wonder and alarm at the strange expression with which he was looking after her. She returned rather timidly and apologetically. ‘I had forgotten to ask if you think Monsieur l’Abbé will be soon released,’ she said.

‘Yes, but he must leave this district; it will not do to release him openly, you understand. It must be supposed that he goes away to be judged elsewhere.’

‘Ah! how glad you must be that you can do such things!’ she said, and he watched her go once more, and then laughed low to himself, a laugh with little mirth in it.

Crowding thoughts, and an inward treasury of joy into which she only let herself now and then give a shy glance, sent Edmée on her way, heedless of her usual fears and difficulties. She looked up brightly at the convent as she passed under its high walls, glad to think that one captive at least would soon be freed, and by her intercession. Secret impatience to return quickened her steps until she reached the market square, into which several streets led; it was the oldest part of the town; quaint wooden houses stood back

from it, with doors adorned with huge nails, and high slated roofs. The first storey of many projected far forward, and was supported by great wooden pillars, dark with age, and carved window-sills. The narrow, ill-paved streets, between high and silent houses, had something claustreal in their gloom and stillness, especially at this time, when a feeling of vague but profound terror and uncertainty pervaded the town, and no man felt safe unless unheard and unseen, but in the market square there was some life and bustle. Fruit and vegetables were heaped here and there on the ground, just under the shelter of the projecting first-floors, or out in the free space, each market-woman sitting by her stores, and calling attention vigorously to their merits. Buying and selling, eating and drinking, must go on whatever happens, and there were many busy housewives, bargaining and managing as best they could the serious difficulty of paying in paper money for which they could get no change, so that they had perforce to buy up to the value of their assignat. Edmée heard one angry buyer lamenting that when she only wanted a few sous' worth of goods, she must spend her note of five livres, and another bewailing the scarcity and dearness of provisions. 'Lamb at twelve francs a pound!' she cried, 'and wood at 400 francs the *corde*, ready money!' 'It is all the doing of the *émigrés* and the *calotins*,' muttered a second. Edmée got out of their way, and moved towards the freer space round the fountain in the middle of the square. As she was passing it, her sleeve was roughly plucked by a woman, who sat close to it, apart from the others, beside a heap of fruit, vegetables, and flowers so crushed and carelessly arranged that no one had cared to stop and examine them. 'Are you from the Maison Aignan?' she asked, in a low sharp whisper, and Edmée, standing still, startled, shrank from the flashing black eyes and pallid face.

'Yes,' she answered, with some uneasiness.

'Listen, then; I have a message for you. Seem to buy something—look at the fruit—it is from my son, the Abbé Gérusez.'

'Your son! Ah, are you his mother?' cried Edmée, rejoicing in the good news which she had to tell.

'His stepmother. What! you are like all the rest, who think we are nothing to each other because another woman bore him? What else did she ever do for him? Was it not I who loved him and worked for him? He held out his

little arms to me the first time he saw me, and my heart opened and took him in, and he has been there ever since. My good son! I said he should be a priest; I slaved for it, night and day, and there was not a prouder mother in France than I the day he said his first mass! He loves me well, my Martin!

‘And you are not afraid to be here?’ said Edmée, overpowered and confused by the vehemence of the woman, all the more intense that she spoke under her breath, with fierce, hard self-control.

‘Afraid—of what? Because of him? I tell you these narrow hearts think of us as two—animals that they are! What do they understand but flesh and blood? They would imagine, no doubt, that I should break my heart if my daughter Marie were in his place, but Martin, bah! only her stepson! Marie! has she not her husband and child? she does not want me, she! but he, my Martin, he always needed the old mother, always had a smile for her. Ah, my son, my son,’ she wailed, wringing her hands, and with features convulsed with anguish, suppressed in a moment as she saw someone coming up, but it was only to glance disdainfully at the pile of vegetables, and pass on.

‘Do not grieve so; you will have him back,’ Edmée whispered, unable to keep back the consolation in her power to give. The woman half-started up and gripped her arm.

‘Hold your peace, child! how should you know what to say? Have him back in the other world, you mean? What am I to do with the years that lie empty between? Will he hold out his hand to me there and need me as he does here, I ask you? He is too good for me here—what will he be there? Wait till you have felt like me, and then speak if you can!’

‘I did not mean that,’ said Edmée, afraid to betray too much, and longing to hear the message which hitherto she had had no opportunity to ask. ‘May I know what he wished to say to me?’

‘I cannot tell you here; the people are beginning to stare; I will walk your way. Well then, little citoyenne,’ she added in a purposely raised tone, ‘I will carry these things for you, our ways lie together,’ and she rose, as by this time most of the other market-women were doing, and strode along by Edmée’s side, with her heavy basket on her

shoulder, regardless of the jeers of some of her fellow-*mar-chandes*. 'Tiens! Mère Claude, your basket is not much lighter!' cried one; while another, pointing to Edmée, observed, 'She has got one customer, anyhow! A *vieux chat jeune souris*—how the poor little thing will be scolded when she gets La Claude's stuff home!' 'Well, well,' a third observed good-naturedly, 'it is not often Mère Claude brings such *choses de rebut* to market, we all know that.'

But La Claude, as they called her, passed on unheeding, only slackening her pace when she got into a quiet place, and then she spoke again. 'Was it not to you that he was going the night he was arrested? denounced by that scoundrel De Pelven, who lives in your house? How did he know my son was coming? From you? Ah, little viper, if I thought so I would strangle you with my two hands as you stand!'

But Edmée had received a shock which made her disregard the menace of the woman towering above her, with eyes aflame. 'Denounced by the Citoyen Pelven! It is impossible—besides, I told no one.'

'Well for you! How do I know? That is easy to tell; my nephew Jean—Marius he calls himself now—is head keeper of the prison well, why not? one must live, and is it not better that the poor creatures there should have a gaoler who treats them well, and will sometimes contrive to give or take a message for them? He saw your Pelven come the other evening in the dusk, and ask for Citoyen Droz, who has his bureau in the convent now, and Jean had a fancy to hear what they said to each other—'

'And—and then?'

'He heard *that*! He heard Pelven advise Droz to keep watch along the river at the foot of your garden, for that one of those days he would catch my son. My Martin! he never disobeyed me but once, and that was when I had got him away into safety, and he came back to his people—Ah! hounds that they are; who so much as tried to lift up a finger to help him when he was dragged through the streets?'

'What was his message to me?' asked Edmée, in so brief and hard a voice as roused even the Mère Claude from her one absorbing thought.

'He bids you, as you value your salvation, beware of the Citizen Pelven, and believe nothing he tells you,' she answered, with a momentary wonder and interest.

‘Oh, if I could see Monsieur l’Abbé! If I could but speak to him!’

‘It is not impossible—Me they know. Jean dare not let me pass; but you are a stranger, a country girl; you could pass in, perhaps, and then you would tell me how he looks, what he said, if he needs anything—you promise that?’

‘Yes, I will.’

‘Then try; see, take this and this, and go to the door, asking for the Citoyen Marius—Marius, mind; tell him his aunt sent him them, and when no one hears, say that I said he was to let you see my son. Ah, you will see him, you!’

At another time Edmée would have responded to the straining wistfulness of the woman’s face, but she too was now full of one absorbing thought. She left the Mère Claude hurriedly, without any farewell, taking the fruit put into her hands almost unconsciously, and went rapidly to the convent door, without a thought of the danger or difficulties in her way. Her summons brought a turnkey, who readily fetched the head gaoler, a man with a face not unkind, but stolid and impassive; his superiors thought his quiet dull manner a recommendation, and had never suspected the lively spirit of curiosity which lay beneath it. Very few things passed among them with which ‘Marius’ was not perfectly *au fait*. He nodded in answer to Edmée’s message, and observed, ‘You are fatigued, my little cabbage; you want to rest, eh?—No; you live close by? No matter, I have something to send to the aunt—come in and wait, for now I am occupied.’ This was said in the hearing of his subordinates, one or two of whom might possibly know Edmée by sight; he took her into his own little room, and, without closing the door, but standing so as to be sure no one was within earshot, asked in a lowered voice, ‘Now then, the other half of thy business?’ Edmée had, of course, only spoken of the fruits which she had brought, before the ears in the corridor.

‘I want to see the Abbé Gérusez. I want to know whether a message which the Citoyen Pelven brought me from him is true,’ she answered, feeling that absolute frankness was her best weapon.

The gaoler gave a long whistle. ‘You ask enough when you are about it, my lass!—Speak to one of the prisoners!—

So the Citoyen Pelven brought you a message from Martin, did he? See, you shall tell me what it was, and I will promise to get you a true answer; but you cannot see him, that is impossible.'

'No! I must see him, and no one will know that I have not a permit. If anyone sees me, say that I came about business of M. de—of the Citizen Pelven's I mean.'

'And if he should be asked about it, eh?'

'He will not contradict it, you may be sure of that.'

'It would be much better to tell me,' urged Marius 'What! you will not? Ah, *la jeunesse* is always ill-advised'—Edmée could see that his curiosity was gaining the upper hand. 'Well, well, I will see what I can do. Look here, if you go up that staircase and turn to the right you will see another; it is one way into the choir; it is in the room beyond that the birds are caged. You will go down, and stand at the bottom, out of sight. It is dark there, for we had to stop up a window to make the cage safer. I will tell the abbé to be on the look-out.'

As Edmée obeyed, she thought to herself that her obliging ally no doubt had some lurking corner whence he intended to overhear all which passed; but that could not be helped. The one thing she had at heart was to speak face to face with the Abbé Gérusez.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT THE ABBÉ SAID.

EDMÉE made her way unobserved, first up, then down, as she had been directed. The ground-floor had been appropriated to various uses by the municipality, but the one above was uninhabited; the cells stood empty, the light fell on dusty floors which no foot had crossed for months. A spiral staircase led to the choir, to which access was barred by a small door, locked and bolted; but its key had been slipped into her hand by the gaoler. She opened it so easily that the thought crossed her mind that he must often use this un-

noticed means of ingress for his own ends. The choir was very dark, its windows having been boarded up, and there was little trace of its original destination, for the painted glass was shattered, the altar demolished, the pavement wrenched up here and there in the search for Church plate, supposed to be concealed under it. Planks were piled up, old boxes, a broken ladder, chairs and benches were heaped together ; it was evidently considered the lumber-room of the *rez-de-chaussée*. Edmée came cautiously down the last step, and into the gloom, venturing at length to look through the door which led into a corridor, with a grating perhaps lately erected at each end, and another door, open, through which she could see the long, bare room in which the prisoners were lodged. Through this room, and the passage, and the choir, they could move about at will, but the rest of the church and garden was forbidden to them, and they could only see a tree-top here and there through the high windows. One set of prisoners after another had occupied the space into which Edmée was looking ; after a short time they were sent away to be tried—seldom indeed to be released. There were some twenty people there now, some walking up and down, with steps slow or impetuous, as hopelessness or impatience of the restraint prevailed in each heart ; several were sitting at a long table, leaning their heads silently on their hands ; two were playing at backgammon, and seemed to take a lively interest in their game, and a few were talking together. There were four or five priests, and a sprinkling of gentlemen ; but the greater part were artisans, or tradesmen, denounced perhaps by unsuccessful rivals. In a few moments a turnkey came in, bringing a heap of straw, which he threw down, and bade the prisoners divide as best they could for their beds. Another followed with a pitcher of water, and a second of their soup, which was all that the municipal authorities judged necessary to furnish in the way of food. If, however, a prisoner had friends with courage enough to call attention on themselves who would send him provisions, or had a bundle of assignats to share between his purchases and a gaoler, the scanty meal might be supplemented, and some of the prisoners had private stores, which were brought out when the turnkeys were gone. If Edmée had been in a mood for observing human nature, she would have found a various study in the way in which some unblushingly con-

sumed their stores, under the hungry eye of others, who had only the meagre prison fare, while several shrank a little apart, half ashamed of themselves, but reluctant to part with their bread, or eggs, or butter. Several shared all they had with a neighbour, with a cheerful and genial readiness which brightened even this gloomy place. Edmée saw more than one offer something to the Abbé Gérusez, who had eaten with relish his dish of soup, but he always declined, smiling, and evidently suggesting some other recipient, and walked up and down, with quiet steps, a little book of devotions in his hand, which had escaped the notice of his captors, though his breviary had been taken from him. He looked pale, but his face had lost the anxious and haggard air which she had seen on it when they met before, and had regained the cheerful, pleasant expression familiar to it in earlier days. Certainty, even of almost inevitable death, was less terrible to him than the hunted life, bristling with dangers, known and unknown, which he had been leading. Edmée thought there was not one priest there, though several were well-born, and far more intellectual-looking, whom she should so readily trust as the peasant-abbé. He stopped occasionally, and spoke gently now to one, now to another, even to a priest whom all the other ecclesiastics seemed markedly to shun, and eye askance, though he seemed a humble, inoffensive creature, and looked distressed and pained by the pointed disdain shown him by his fellow-ecclesiastics, to whom as a *jureur*, a man who had taken the oath of obedience to the Convention, he was a renegade, an apostate, and a castaway. He was now arrested on the charge of want of patriotism in refusing to marry.

Edmée was beginning to despair of ever speaking to the Abbé Gérusez, who never came within reach of such a call as she dared give, when she saw Marius come in, carrying the fruit which she had brought him, and a loaf which must have come out of his own cupboard. He summoned the abbé in a harsh and peremptory tone, and dropped half the fruit on the floor, as if on purpose to give him the trouble of picking them up, with an affectation of insolence which he always assumed towards this prisoner, lest he should be supposed to favour him as a connection and old friend. 'There! take them,' those near heard him say, as the abbé, who knew his tactics, stooped and smiled unseen; 'is the time of good patriots to be thrown away in waiting on a pig of a *calotin*?'

But he contrived, as they stood close together, to add a few words for his ear alone, which made him start and look towards the other end of the hall, up which, after giving away the best part of his unexpected stores to those least well supplied, he slowly walked, unobserved, for it was a usual thing for one or another of the priests to spend an hour in prayer in the desecrated chapel, which at least offered them solitude and quiet, crossed the passage, and stood before Edmée, saying in the kind voice which had attracted her when she first met him, 'God be with you, daughter; I had not ventured to hope that we were to meet.' She caught his rough peasant hand and kissed it, and he felt rather than saw her agitation. 'Hush, hush, my poor child; is it for me you are troubled? Do not waste your tears; I am a happy man compared to what I was when I saw you before; I have nothing now to fear.'

'Oh, then it was true you are to be freed?' she cried, with a revulsion of feeling, instantly changed into the bitterest disappointment by his quiet answer, 'Freed, yes . freed from sin and failure, and the fear of my own weakness. I and my fellow-priests go to Paris to-morrow.'

Edmée stood dumb, then with a wail of pain, more, after all, for herself than anyone else, she said, 'Your poor mother!'

'Ah, my mother,' and his voice shook, as he spoke the name with deep tenderness. 'My dear, good mother! but even she must suffer less now than when she was fearing for me from morning till night and night till morning.' He paused, thinking how the passionate supplications of Mère Claude had moved him, more even than his natural timidity, to that action which he had repented with the bitterest shame, and expiated since by returning into the thick of danger. 'God bless her! Tell her, if you can, that all was easy and welcome except leaving her; yes, that is hard. But, my daughter, you have made your way here to confess to me! There is no time to lose.'

He sat down on a box, awaiting her words; but Edmée's foremost purpose was not what he supposed.

'*Mon père*—first, have you seen M. de Pelven?'

'I have; and you, did you receive my message?' he answered with a tinge of sternness.

'He told me that he had seen you. that you did not think me bound to Monsieur le Chevalier.'

‘Did he! did he! Ah,—and you believed him?’

‘Yes. Ah, *mon père*, never mind that, it can wait—but tell me what passed between him and you.’

‘He asked for Monsieur your husband’s address, for tidings of him, which I could not give; he then sought to learn by stealth as it were, whether I would pronounce you free, appealing to me as a priest, for he is a clever man, this De Pelven, and knows how to lead one in the track he desires. I could but say that to me it seemed that since you had both consented to the union, you were bound, and ought to accomplish it by the religious rite as soon as possible. He tried hard to get a contrary opinion out of me, and told me, at first by hints, then plainly, that unless I would give him a written decision such as he wished, I was a dead man. Ah, he knows human nature—he is a terribly skilful tempter, that De Pelven; had I been less weary of life, and if I did not remember how I suffered after my flight, when conscience was against me, I must have yielded! But it was not worth while,’ added the abbé, with a sad smile. ‘My child, I have prayed earnestly for you; you are in mortal peril—do you love this man?’

‘I did.’

‘Poor child! you think, now that you have newly learnt his baseness, that you love him no more; but when you see him again, when you come into daily contact with him, how will it be?’

‘I shall never love him any more.’

‘You fancy so, like hundreds of other women, who count too much on their own strength where the man they love is concerned. But listen, my daughter—has he ever spoken of marriage to you?’

Edmée looked straight in his face, bewildered. Then, her pale face colouring all over, she answered, ‘No; but he never spoke of love till yesterday.’

‘And never will speak of anything else. Child, you stand on a precipice.’

Edmée hardly heard the kind, anxious voice; the earnest advice which followed fell dull on her ear. She stood before the abbé stunned, speechless; she did not know what he said, or whether she answered, and was only roused by the door by which she had come into the chapel being opened, while Marius thrust his head in, saying impatiently, ‘Have you

not said enough to each other yet, you two? The clock strikes, and you stay, as if you were at home here! Come then, I have risked enough to please you; come, I say, there is no time for farewells; and hold your tongue, my girl, about having seen him, or your head, as well as mine, will wag. Come along.' He enforced his address by an outstretched hand, and she yielded to the grasp, looking with piteous eyes at the abbé, and murmuring, 'Yet I did so pray to be helped!'

'And you have been heard, for your way has been made clear before you, my child; you have been shown what this man is,' replied the priest, pityingly. She just heard the words as she was hurried through the door, which Marius locked and bolted fast. 'Have I been heard?—Thus! thus!' she kept repeating to herself, with a kind of terror, as if her prayer, instead of bringing comfort, had been flung back like a missile to strike her, and she was deaf to whatever the gaoler might be saying, and hardly knew when or how she found herself in the street, with but a few steps between her and the Maison St. Aignan. Time to think over what she had heard there was none, but she knew it was true—understood how she had been dealt with, and recoiled, as only a pure and innocent girl could, from the deception practised upon her, the intentions which De Pelven had harboured towards her, recoiled with a strength of indignation which swept away that dawning love that, in a nature like Edmée's, might have become a master passion. She was one of those women who must esteem where they love; to endure the companionship of any whom she could not respect was almost intolerable; to give them a place in her heart absolutely impossible. Indignation burned so hot within her that she walked unflinchingly into the salon, though she heard voices there that warned her she must meet De Pelven. She saw him make a gesture as if gently protesting against something, while Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was speaking vehemently, with her hand on a newspaper, which she seemed to have pushed away from her on the table. 'Forgive me, it was inexcusable thoughtlessness to have left it in your way,' he was saying; and then they saw Edmée, and he instantly perceived that a change had come over her since they parted. 'She has learnt something!' he said inwardly, but aloud he asked gaily, 'And what have you purchased to-day, mademoiselle?' Her pride in her economy and successful marketings was often a subject of jest between them.

‘A little knowledge, monsieur,’ she answered, looking up at him with an expression which until now he had never seen in those soft, Spanish eyes, fringed with long jet-black lashes.

‘A little knowledge? that is apt to be a dangerous commodity, and cost dear,’ he answered significantly. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan interrupted, unheeding the by-play. ‘This child shall judge; she can have no prejudices either way. Listen, *petite*; the question is whether we stay here or go to Paris, where my cousin can still protect us—he is obliged very soon to return there, and here danger thickens every hour. In this very newspaper, which he chanced to leave about, I read that at Lyons four of my oldest friends have been guillotined, last week; one, a nun, the best woman I ever knew, was forced to stand by the guillotine, waiting for death while an ass dressed up in a priest’s vestment, with a mitre on its head, was led round and round it, with the mob shouting out their ribaldry! Here the popular temper grows worse every day—you have felt it yourself. M. de Pelven has, I am confident, risked much to defend us so long—’

‘How should we be safer at Paris, mademoiselle?’

‘We might escape notice there,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, quite unconscious that she was repeating what De Pelven had previously suggested to her mind, and fully believing the train of thought was her own. ‘Here it is impossible. I am marked out by my residence, my name. There, called—let me see,—ah, my Christian name will do—the Citoyenne Valentin, we should be insignificant atoms in a crowd.’

‘Does monsieur advise this?’

‘I dare not advise either way, mademoiselle; the responsibility is too great; all that I can say is that my whole interest, such as it is, my cousin can entirely dispose of,’ said De Pelven, perceiving that to throw a few drops of cold water on Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s scheme would only make her resolution to carry it out the hotter.

‘We must go,’ she said decisively. ‘There is no choice, unless we mean to visit Paris without our own consent, like the poor wretches who have already gone from here; of course we must go; you cannot help seeing it?’ she added impatiently, unaware of Edmée’s many strong reasons for doubting the advisability of the scheme.

‘I should stay here,’ said Edmée, briefly, much to the indignation of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

‘Stay here, you very foolish child, when I have shown you distinctly that it is impossibly dangerous? Why do you not tell her so, my cousin? I shall begin to think you are afraid of the risk of protecting me, if you persist in opposing me! Yes, yes, I know that you have said nothing! is it not that of which I complain? and when you know too that I am perishing of *ennui* here! I endured it well enough till you came, but after having some society, and coming back to life again, am I to be plunged into an abyss of dulness afresh? I tell you I have not courage for it. No, we go to Paris, it is decided,’ cried Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, stimulated by the mute deprecation of the looks and gestures with which he replied to each sentence, though without attempting to slip in a word. ‘Do you hear, *petite*? We go to Paris.’

Edmée was silent; she could not explain openly why she objected with all her strength to this scheme, all the more that she felt sure De Pelven had somehow brought it about.

He now said, with a little shrug, ‘In that case, were it not useless, I should advise you, dear cousin, to look as little *grande dame* as possible, but I fear that Nature is too strong for any disguise to be of much avail. At least, recollect that you might as well put on your shroud at once as silks and brocades. I do entreat you, wear a plain cotton dress, and avoid unpopular colours. Nothing is a trifle now.’

‘True, I will do so, and this child too. Now let us dine, and then we will make such preparations as we can,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan gaily, her spirits rising at the thought of change. ‘You will undertake to find us a lodging, with a good patriot, my cousin, who will not be too clear-sighted, nor cheat us too much, for my resources are not unbounded, I can tell you.’

Edmée was so busy under her directions all the rest of the day, working at the dresses required in order to avoid attracting immediate attention, helping to decide what could be taken, and what left, that De Pelven had no opportunity of a word with her until night, when he found an instant to stop her unobserved, and look enquiringly in her face. He could hear her heart beat, but her first words were not what he expected. ‘Monsieur, why have you made mademoiselle go to Paris?’ she demanded.

‘That unhappy gazette! I little thought I had left it here—’

‘I asked you why you desired this going to Paris, monsieur.’

‘It is welcome to me, most welcome. I do not affect to deny it; surely you can guess the reason? How else could I have still had you within reach?’

‘Never speak to me again as if we could be more than strangers, monsieur? Enemies, if you please, but friends never again!’

‘My pretty Edmée, it might be more dangerous than you imagine to have me as an enemy,’ he replied, with a slight ominous smile. ‘Much more dangerous, for you—and for Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.’

The last words were spoken very quietly and clearly; Edmée started as if he had stabbed her. ‘You are cruel!’ she murmured, feeling, as he meant she should, how much the calmly-spoken threat conveyed, and how great a hold it gave him over her.

‘I am never cruel unless circumstances leave me no choice, sweet Edmée,’ he answered, and she heard him laugh low to himself as he let her go, shuddering. He knew that the defenceless girl was at his mercy, but as he thought over the scheme his pale mobile features seemed to harden into inflexible resolution, and a sudden flush passed over them, leaving them more ivory-like and fixed than before. The perception that she had somehow detected him, that the heart which had almost given itself to him had revolted and was free again, intensified his determination to gain her at any cost.

CHAPTER XII.

APARTMENTS IN PARIS.

IN so far as De Pelven had given Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to understand that she was in growing danger at Mortemart, he had not deceived her. The Jacobin party, exasperated by the brave though vain efforts of Lyons to shake off their terrible yoke, had besieged and taken the unhappy town in the beginning of October, and massacre and proscriptions instantly began. ‘Lyons made war on freedom: Lyons is no more,’ said Barrère, before the Committee of Public Salvation,

and the very name of the unhappy city was suppressed, and it was ordered to be thenceforward known as the 'Commune Affranchie.' For six months workmen were employed in demolishing the chief houses of Lyons; the stately Place de Bellecour became a heap of ruins, and since the guillotine could not dispose fast enough of the prisoners, cannon loaded with grapeshot were used to make speedy work of whole batches of victims. The Jacobin emissaries, sent down from Paris, sought far and wide for fresh prey; even small towns, off the main roads, and scarcely known beyond their immediate district, like Mortemart, were visited and exhorted to show their patriotism by detecting fugitives, and sending a good show of prisoners to Lyons or Paris. There were moments when the danger was so sweeping that De Pelven trembled for himself, and for Edmée. But for her he would not have attempted to protect Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; but as yet he had not seen his way to saving the one without the other. His value to the leading Republicans in Paris was his stronghold, and, though at the risk of involving the two women in even greater danger at a later time, he secured them from immediate arrest by declaring that they were necessary to him, as means of unravelling the conspiracy which he had come to Mortemart to detect. He trusted to his own powers of conducting an intrigue to save Edmée later; perhaps her hostess too, if it would suit him. It was by the same pretext that he secured for them a free passport for Paris, and it was out of the question that the diligence should stop openly at the Maison St. Aignan to take them. Their luggage was carried away late at night, and loaded unnoticed at the 'auberge,' where it changed horses—the auberge, once known as 'La Croix Blanche,' but now designated as 'Bon Patriote;' and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan and Edmée walked out in the dusk half a mile along the road, escorted by De Pelven, to await the lumbering vehicle. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan found her *embonpoint* and her high heels combine to make this walk so difficult that she laughingly reminded Edmée how she had always declared that Nature and fashion alike rendered flight impossible to her. Edmée could only secretly wonder at her gaiety, and watch the face of De Pelven, calm and unmoved, but she knew it well enough to detect concealed anxiety and a look of relief when the roll of wheels and loud clack of a whip told that the diligence was approaching.

‘There it is ! Ah, you never thought we should get off safely, *mon cousin*,’ cried Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, laughingly. ‘What ! you thought I did not see that ? Would it have made it easier to you and the child if I had stood shaking and weeping ? Your hand, to help me in, since the gentleman whom I see already seated does not seem inclined to assist me !’

The driver had been on the look-out for them ; he exchanged a look with De Pelven ; the whip clacked, the horses pulled, and they lumbered on along the white road, stretching out like a long ribbon, up one hill, down another, between dusty elms, turning yellow and sere, past slow-gliding streams and poor mud-built villages, at considerable distances from each other, where thin, haggard peasants looked after them, and lean dogs followed barking. The people seemed miserably fed and clothed, and in the towns where they changed horses there was an indescribable air of terror and depression, but the face of the country bore tokens of a change for the better. Barren tracts were being brought into cultivation ; stubble-fields showed that corn had been sown and reaped ; labourers were working with the energy of men toiling for themselves and not for their masters, and if women still harnessed themselves to the plough, it was no longer with dull and hopeless submission to an irresistible authority, but on ground which was their own. Oppressive and unjust as the sale of Church lands and *bien d’émigrés* was, the effect on the prosperity of the country could not but be good in the end, for the seigneurs had kept great part of the country fallow for hunting purposes, and the rights of the convents had fallen crushingly on the peasantry, who bore the chief burden of taxation, and were worse off then than in any civilised part of Europe. Tolls and imposts met them at every turn, misery brutalised the very women.

The only other occupant of the diligence was the man whose want of politeness scandalised Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. His costume marked him out as an ardent *enragé* ; he had a sallow face, a great deal of dark hair, and equally dark eyebrows, and there was something theatrical about him which suggested that he had been or was an actor. He cast evil and ominous looks towards the three who had just got in, opened a newspaper, and in a stentorian voice began reading aloud, evidently with the hope of rousing or startling them

into some expression of opinion, such details of the scenes passing at Paris and Lyons, that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan turned pale, and Edmée recalled with sickening horror the talk only too familiar to her ears among Leroux's chosen friends. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's coloured handkerchief and cotton dress were indeed a very thin disguise; she looked an unmistakable aristocrat, Edmée too had much the same air, and De Pelven's dress and haughtily-refined features told their tales of rank so clearly that to feign himself anything but a noble would have been vain indeed. It was with manifest surprise that their alarming fellow-traveller heard himself addressed with some remark which showed a knowledge of who he was, and intimate acquaintance with other Jacobin leaders. A stare of incredulous suspicion showed that the observation was received as a shallow ruse, but a few more words had their effect, and Edmée felt mingled relief and aversion as she saw their companion begin an eager conversation with De Pelven, whose name he soon learned with instant recognition, and ceased to glare at them. He molested them no more, and as he stopped half way to Paris, they got rid of him sooner than they could have hoped. When he had left them De Pelven looked at his companions, and said, 'Collet d'Herbois!'

It was a long and fatiguing journey, now through forest-land and by empty ruined châteaux, now among the vineyards of Burgundy; they slept once or twice in some miserable and exorbitant inn; but De Pelven was in haste to get to Paris, and there seemed a sense of safety in reaching their destination, so that they hardly thought of their weariness until reaching it, and then, though Edmée was not only exhausted but depressed, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was still gay, amused, and amusing. All the anxieties and doubts seemed to fall to the younger one's share. It was indignant misery to her to be there in constant companionship with De Pelven, to feel, as he made her do in a thousand imperceptible ways, that they were in his power. He understood her now well enough to know that his only hope of conquering her lay in making her fear him, but he had not yet realised the strength of passive resistance and resentment in the girl who seemed so easily cowed; and when she shrank and grew silent he thought that he was gaining ground. He did not see that it was not the deceit practised on herself that she

could not forgive ; but the downfall of her ideal, an exquisite pang which he could not even imagine, though a sense that if she yielded he should lose all which bewitched him in her would cross his mind.

Paris was unusually quiet when they drove up to the *barrière* in the early morning. The necessary formalities were soon gone through, without any of the delays which *Edmée* had expected, and the hour was so early that the streets had a strange, deserted look. *Mademoiselle de St. Aignan* recalled with a little incredulity accounts of half-naked, drunken crowds, brandishing pikes, and shouting revolutionary songs, and asked, as she looked from the windows of the diligence on the empty streets and closed houses, whether there had not been some exaggeration. All seemed to justify the enquiry, for even that terrible *Faubourg St. Antoine*, once an aristocratic part of Paris, but now the head-quarters of the worst and lowest of the populace, seemed sleeping. *Edmée* looked involuntarily at *De Pelven* as the question was asked, and saw it answered by one of his brief and meaning smiles, and *Mademoiselle de St. Aignan* was too much interested in looking out of her window, making out through what streets they were driving, and recognising first one and then another building which she had seen on former visits years before, to notice his silence, but on *Edmée* it made a deep and painful impression. The whole city was full of horror to her ; she dreaded at every turn to see the great structure of the guillotine rising aloft, or to meet a death-cart loaded with victims, perhaps the *Abbé Gêrusez* among them, if he had yet reached Paris. She too had heard of the scenes in Paris, not from an occasional newspaper, like *Mademoiselle de St. Aignan*, but from eye-witnesses, who had given full details with gloating triumph in *Leroux's* house. Many a time since had her dreams been haunted by the roar of voices, the shrieks of murdered victims, the heads borne aloft on pikes, by hideous groups, mad with blood and fury. Lately *Mère Claude* had constantly appeared in this ghostly throng. *De Pelven* saw her ashy paleness and set lips, and involuntarily tried to take one of the cold hands pressed together on her breast. The touch made her start back with a look which he never forgot. He threw himself back into his corner, feeling as if he hardly knew whether he did not hate her more than he loved her,

but above all a fierce and passionate necessity to subdue this spirit to his will. Full as his mind was of matters on which hundreds of lives, and his own among them, depended, this was for the instant at all events his uppermost feeling. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan interposed opportunely as she drew her head back from the window on her side, by asking, 'And where are you going to bestow us, my cousin? I have always forgotten to ask.'

There was no time for much answer, for the diligence was stopping before the hôtel where De Pelven had an apartment, a house near the Louvre, and on such a scale as showed that it had once, and probably not long since, belonged to some rich family. They alighted, and De Pelven, with a friendly nod to the *concierge*, led the way to the second-floor, where breakfast awaited them, in a room very simply furnished, so that the eye of the vulgar might have looked round unenvyingly, but the initiated would see at once that the owner was a man of cultivated tastes. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan looked round approvingly, and the preparations for their reception quickened her appreciation of De Pelven's good taste. 'What! we are expected! This is very hospitable, my cousin, and we owe you infinite thanks for all your kind solicitude. It is then here that we are to lodge?'

'Alas! no, dear mademoiselle; would that I dared place this apartment at your disposal! I had once indeed hoped to do so, for it is my own; but circumstances, I fear, render it impossible.'

He looked at Edmée, who stood mute, but with refusal written in every line of her face. The eyes of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan followed his, and she asked hastily, 'What has *la petite* to do with it? Why should you object, child?'

'I think we had far better have our own apartment, and not trespass on monsieur's politeness,' said Edmée with cold decision; and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan perceived at last that there was some mystery which she had not penetrated, and immediately leaped to a wrong conclusion, which disturbed her very much. De Pelven had not anticipated such open defiance, and it did not at all enter into his plans. 'That is quite too unkind a way of putting it!' he cried jestingly; 'see this little aristocrat, my cousin, who will not allow me to render her a trifling service because of my

unfortunate opinions! It is well that you are less prejudiced! Now I leave you for a short time You will allow me to breakfast with you?’

‘*Allons donc!* in your own house! Pay no attention to this silly girl, my cousin, but return soon, for I am prodigiously hungry.’

De Pelven bowed, and went into a further room, where letters and papers awaited him. He closed the door, and rapidly studied them, gathering in the contents with rapt and concentrated attention, and for the time Edmée was banished from his mind.

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan did not think it necessary to await his return beyond a very short time; but, having got half-way through her meal, she suddenly said, ‘You are not eating, *petite!*’

‘Pardon, mademoiselle.’

‘Why do you always call me mademoiselle, child? *Ma tante* would be more appropriate, it seems to me.’

‘I did not know that you I never thought of it,’ stammered Edmée.

‘Well now you know I do wish it. And since M. de Pelven has generously taken charge of us, I think he ought to be told how it stands with you and my nephew.’

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s suspicions had gone quite astray; it never occurred to her that it could be De Pelven whose heart was in danger.

‘He knows,’ was Edmée’s low answer.

‘How! he knows? And who informed him?’

‘I did. He was speaking to me one day, and I thought it was right to tell him.’

‘Hum!’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, in a tone where displeasure and relief mingled almost equally. ‘You take on yourself to act very independently, *petite*, and I think that I might have been consulted, or at least informed

However, it is all very well, I daresay; but recollect that my nephew left you in my keeping. No emancipating of yourself, if you please, until he returns.’

‘When he returns, I will set him free; until then I shall always remember that I am his wife, dear mademoiselle,’ said Edmée, kneeling down, and kissing the hands of Alain’s aunt.

‘There, that will do, you silly child; eat your breakfast,

and do not look so like a ghost; the long journey, which indeed I thought would never end, has exhausted you. I am not so sure that my nephew will wish to be set free,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, kissing her forehead, and then holding her back to look at her. 'No, not at all sure! Somehow one grows very fond of you, child.'

The words gave Edmée such pleasure that even De Pelven's return did not banish the brightness from her face; she felt as if she might after all baffle him, and unreasonable as it was to hope to foil him simply because she felt happier, the secret thought lent her an arch and provoking charm. Poor child! every admiring look which he gave her in spite of himself but increased the danger of her position. He undertook to find a lodging for them before night, and was absent on his own affairs and theirs the greater part of the day. When he returned he seemed harassed and anxious. 'My cousin,' he said, 'you see me ashamed, distressed; my best endeavours have only found a place which is utterly unfit for you. Unfortunately there is so much to be considered for your safety. I could only venture to place you with known patriots, whom I can trust, and their house is not one where you would be comfortable. If I dared say that you would be safer here! but unhappily it is a rendezvous for my friends. If I went elsewhere, attention would be attracted, questions asked.'

'All we want is a safe refuge, my dear De Pelven. Do not afflict yourself as to any small discomforts or privations; what can they be to what thousands of our countrymen are suffering! You have at least found us a couple of rooms?'

'Yes, but I have not the courage to propose your seeing them.'

'Ah, bah! let us go there at once. I hope, however, that there is a busy street to look out on. I have vastly enjoyed watching all that has passed under these windows to-day. Good heavens! what wonderful costumes! I do not speak of the carmagnoles and the red caps and all that; those I expected, but I saw with these eyes people dressed in classic costume. There were two young men walking along with their arms round each other's necks, and those young men wore blue mantles, white tunics, and sandals!'

'Ah, precisely—scholars of Louis David's, our great authority on classic matters, as doubtless you know, who

organises our public ceremonies, and teaches us what true art is,' said De Pelven, with one of his dubious smiles. The name of David reminded Edmée of the young Swiss, her companion for a few hours of that memorable night which seemed so long ago that she had some difficulty in recalling his name. She wondered if he could be now here, and how he would look in classic costume, but had to renounce the idea of him in mantle and tunic and sandals. How that night seemed to come back upon her! Meanwhile Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had got ready to go, and De Pelven was assuring her that if she absolutely insisted on hiring the rooms, her boxes should be sent there immediately. Edmée was already prejudiced against the lodging because he had found it, and the first sight of the landlady, in the extreme of Republican fashion, with a hard vigilant face, increased her uneasiness. She thought her insolent and inquisitive, though evidently controlled by De Pelven, and very anxious to please him, and Edmée trembled at the prospect of being under her surveillance. The rooms offered them on the third-floor justified De Pelven's excuses. The walls were spotted and stained; an armchair, a heavy table, covered with black leather, a great bed, with dark curtains, and an old carved cupboard, with dust wherever it could lie, composed the chief furniture of the room; and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan stood in evident dismay, while Edmée alternately observed the deprecating face of De Pelven, and the threatening and audacious air of the citoyenne Lafarge, their future landlady, or rather gaoler, as Edmée thought to herself.

'Well, cousin,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, at last, cheerfully, 'we can make it do, no doubt; we can add what we want, and it might be worse. I know you have done the best you can for us, so let us have our baggage, and make ourselves at home. To-morrow you will come and see us. Adieu. You have, no doubt, a thousand things to do, and so have we.' She nodded gaily to him, and then began to point out to Edmée what they must buy, paying no attention to her attempts to make her conciliate the landlady, who stood by with looks auguring no good, and presently, finding herself ignored, went away, slamming the door and muttering, 'Pigs of aristocrats!' very audibly.

'Ah, mademoiselle!' began Edmée in consternation; but Mademoiselle de St. Aignan interrupted with a laugh, 'Yes,

yes, child, it was unpardonably imprudent ; scold me if you will, I deserve it, but what would you have ? The woman is hateful to me ; did you observe her countenance ? hateful, I tell you ; she affects my nerves, and it is too strong for me, *allez !* I could not force myself to be civil to her.'

'We have begun by making her our enemy,' said Edmée, under her breath ; 'and the one friend whom we have here is perhaps more dangerous still !'

CHAPTER XIII.

IN HIDING.

It would be difficult to imagine anything more forlorn than Edmée's position when she found herself in the unknown world of Paris, aware that it teemed with perils, but quite uncertain what it was safe to do ; conscious that a rash gesture, a careless word, would bring herself and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan into imminent danger, fearing to stir out lest some horrible sight should meet her eyes, fearing to enter a shop lest some unpopular form of speech should attract attention, and fearing above all the woman in whose house they were, who watched her so keenly and malignantly whenever they met, and always had some private words with De Pelven when he came. Edmée wondered what was the link between them ; she did not know how much of his secret and unseen power, his knowledge of all that went on, and his skill in avoiding dangers, De Pelven owed to the glamour which he could cast over women of all ranks. Women had always been his best allies, his most useful tools, all the more that not one had ever really touched his heart until he met Edmée. He was inevitably the protector to whom she now looked, in spite of herself ; she could not but relax into something like friendship as every day she felt how entirely helpless and bewildered she would have been but for him. It was he who could tell her what was safest to do, and what must be avoided ; it was he who lessened her sense of responsibility with regard to the entertainment of Made-

moiselle de St. Aignan, who could never venture out, as their one hope of escape lay in avoiding notice, and had almost no variety in the day but the hour which he constantly spent with her, always leaving her amused and cheerful, and Edmée's wary suspicion diminished as she saw the time go by without his alluding to his feelings for her. But each day just then seemed more laden with danger than the one which had preceded it; universal depression and terror had pervaded all ranks since the terrible law against the suspected had passed, which declared anyone liable to arrest who had *émigré* relations, were of noble birth, had done nothing for the cause of liberty, were too much taken up by private affairs to be duly interested in public ones, or spread bad news! There were already 3,000 prisoners in Paris alone, and the numbers rose by hundreds daily, most of them innocent of any crime but that of gentle birth or fortune, and the country swarmed with revolutionary committees, who held in their hands the life of everyone in France. The very children learned to watch their looks and words, and the danger was so tremendous that while numbers cowered helplessly, quite as many rushed into the wildest licence, desperate and reckless. To be forgotten was the best hope of those who had any hope at all. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had expected to find some old friends at Paris, but she soon found that social intercourse was dead, and that the tempest had scattered even those most closely connected. Even life at Mortemart was livelier than that in her room in Paris. Edmée marvelled at the cheerfulness with which she accepted her position, gathering amusement from every trivial circumstance, and in some incomprehensible way learning the history of everyone in the house. She soon contrived to make friends with the little old father-in-law of the landlady, a small grey man, who held his formidable daughter-in-law in great fear and awe, and dared not lift a finger without her leave when she was within sight, but would climb up on some pretext or other to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's room when he could do so undetected, and find consolation in whispering his secret feelings towards his *fillâtre*, as he called her, to his amused auditor. The careful toilette which he always made before appearing before her highly amused her, all the more that though he could never resist coming, he was evidently on thorns lest he should be found out, and would

flee in haste, and doff cravat and coat with trembling hands at the least suspicion that the citoyenne Lafarge was coming home from her marketing, her visits to the Convention, or from the executions, now amounting to sixty or seventy a day. 'It was always the way with her,' old Lafarge would say in his quavering voice, 'even when my son was alive, though he would try to keep her away, even locking her up when there was anyone hanged, and—(he had such courage, my poor son!) threatening to beat her, she always found means to be present! We all have our tastes, and that is hers—what would you have? some are born so. For me, I shudder to think of such things. I went once, because she said I must, and there is no gainsaying what she chooses, but I was so ill afterwards that I had to take *fleur d'orange* to tranquillise myself, and go to bed, for I am tender-hearted, you see, very tender-hearted. It is a great misfortune to be so tender-hearted as I am!'

Nevertheless the old man contrived to know all that was going on, and his talk often left Mademoiselle de St. Aignan sad and anxious enough, though her natural good spirits and the wish to cheer Edmée kept the fears which darkened daily in the background. The year was closing in ever-increasing gloom. October had seen the execution of the Queen, at the very hour the tombs of St. Denis were broken open by the mob, and November had begun by a public renunciation of Christianity, in the name of the nation. Provisions became scarcer and scarcer, and even the out-of-the-way street in which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan lodged was sometimes filled by a furious mob rushing by to break open some baker's shop. At first the citoyenne Lafarge had provided a few loaves from time to time for her two lodgers, but with so ill a grace that Edmée, as soon as she discovered how to dispense with her reluctant assistance, took the matter into her own hands, and would go out and stand in the crowd which would stand for hours waiting to be served about the shops, sometimes only to be dispersed by an incursion of the populace, less patient, perhaps less hungry than the pale women who had waited since dawn in vain. She was beginning to wonder how long their slender means would hold out; their lodgings were extravagantly dear, as were provisions, and where was more money to come from? She saw with dread the possibility of being driven to apply to De Pelven,

and set herself to avoid this necessity with all her might, spent five francs on materials for lace-making, for even now the love of lace was not extinct, though the coarsest and commonest dress was supposed to be worn by all, and she hoped to dispose of her work to some shop, if not immediately, a little later. A few more francs went for painting materials, but this was rather to please Mademoiselle de St. Aignan than with much hope of gaining money, and Edmée rather grudged the extravagance until the delight of handling a brush and colours banished all regrets. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan watched her at work with pleasure, surprised by her absorption in her occupation, and would stand by her, making suggestions with all the audacity of ignorance.

‘But do you know, she has talent, great talent,’ she said, on one occasion, when Edmée was not present, as she showed a half-finished painting to De Pelven, who was accustomed to bring such flowers as the late season afforded, well pleased that Edmée should accept them, even if with hesitating reluctance. ‘It is surprising. But to be sure she has had great advantages in being so much with my dear sister-in-law as she was.’

‘You think that talent, like immorality, can be communicated from the upper ranks to the lower?’ asked De Pelven, while he looked with far more critical appreciation than Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was capable of at the beautiful little group of flowers which Edmée had been engaged on.

‘Not quite that; I am a liberal, you know,’ answered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, in perfect good faith, ‘but still one does not expect to find distinguished gifts among the people. But there is no accounting for these things. As for this child, she is an aristocrat, born by mistake among the lower ranks. But for that no pains could have made her what she is; one cannot deny that when a person is not *née*, the difference shows in every look and action and mode of feeling to life’s end.’

‘It is of course as a liberal that you speak, my cousin?’

‘Assuredly; because one is a liberal one need not fly in the face of facts and common-sense. I mean to continue her education, though I daresay it is illegal, since the Convention has closed all places of public instruction! You must procure something for her to read with profit; I could bring but two or three volumes with me, and I do not care that she

should study them ; they are all very well for you and me, though even I, in these times, feel as if I should like something which suggested there might be a better world than this elsewhere.'

'You would probably be quite contented with this, my cousin, if you could arrange it after your own fancy.'

'That is what your friends are seeking to do, Hébert, St. Just, Collet d'Herbois, Robespierre and the rest, only they want to lay the foundations on heaps of heads. Good heavens ! what tyranny ever equalled this mob rule ?'

'Hush, dear cousin ! you forget that we are all good patriots now, perforce.'

'Yes—perforce. De Pelven, you are a man of good birth—a very clever man between ourselves, what do you think of it all ?'

'Think of it all !' he answered slowly, unconsciously lowering his voice. 'I think that we are living in times teeming with events whose outcome the best politician living cannot calculate ; the consequences of this Revolution will be felt, unless I am greatly mistaken, as long as the world lasts.'

'It is coming to an end, I think ! what a change since '90 ! The political horizon seemed almost cloudless then, do you remember ? Nobody seemed much excited ; gold began to get rather scarce, I recollect ; but we had not the worry of these miserable assignats, and we were full of hopes. And now ! who would have believed that a man would dare to stand up before his fellow-countrymen in our public assembly, and declare himself an atheist amid general applause ; or, again, that the vessel of the Revolution must come into port on waves of blood ?'

'Who would believe it ? Anyone who knew what it was to set a nation of slaves suddenly free.'

'Well, well, these matters are safer left alone ; we will be content to agree on this one point,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, laughing, and glad to take a lighter tone, 'that everyone in this Paris of ours is crazy, except myself and two or three more, who think as I do. Here comes the child she looks pale, does she not ? Yet I think when my nephew comes home he will say she is greatly embellished.'

This was the first hint which she had given of the relations between Alain and Edmée. De Pelven could not

tell whether Edmée heard or not; but she turned back into the little kitchen adjoining the room serving as bedchamber and salon, and he said hastily, 'Is it possible that you encourage that wild idea?—you cannot think her bound by that absurd mock-marriage? it is monstrous!'

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan stared at him. 'It could not be my wish that the heir of our family should marry the steward's daughter; I feel that as keenly as yourself, my cousin, but the thing is done, and I have learned to love the child. Hush she is coming.'

Edmée looked white and weary, and when questioned confessed to being tired and sleepy.

'You have been on foot all the afternoon, starching my caps and ruffs,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, half-tenderly, half-reproachfully, 'and now you have prepared supper what should I do without this little girl, cousin? And I believe she went out early, to procure bread?'

'You should not do that!' said De Pelven, quickly. 'At what hour did you go?'

'One must try to be among the first,' answered Edmée evasively; 'there was a great crowd, and many who came late got none.'

She did not like to own that she had stood in the throng from four in the morning till eleven before obtaining her loaf of coarse bread.

'I thought that citoyenne Lafarge undertook to procure provisions for you,' said De Pelven.

'She did; but I prefer doing it for myself monsieur.'

'Is she unaccommodating, then?'

'Well not too amiable,' answered Edmée, smiling.

De Pelven knit his brows. He perceived a complication of which Edmée was unconscious. The instincts of a jealous woman had revealed more than he desired to Madame Lafarge, and it would need all his skill to steer through these troubled waters. It was with an effort that he roused himself to talk as usual; Mademoiselle de St. Aignan perceived it, and said, as he rose to go, 'My cousin, I cannot thank you enough for your kindness to us when no doubt your time and thoughts are overfull, for even you, I fear, are not safe in these frightful days.'

'Safe! scarcely, dear mademoiselle; is anyone safe, high or low, now?'

‘And perhaps the attempt to protect us endangers you still more?’

He smiled and answered, ‘If so, I shall expect full payment some day soon, dear mademoiselle,’ and, as he bowed to Edmée, he added, ‘Do not forget that; I know you keep the purse.’

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan thought that he merely wished to put aside her gratitude by a playful reply. Edmée knew better, and quailed. Instead of returning to her drawing when he was gone, or taking up her lace-pillow, she came and sat by Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s knee, rested her head against it, and drew her friend’s hand round her neck. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan heard her sigh, and asked, ‘What are you thinking of, *petite*?’

‘I scarcely know, mademoiselle; of you, I believe—how hard all this must be for you, used to such a different life!’

‘Yes, I suppose it is,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, looking round the room. ‘It is not only the living with a sword hanging over one’s head, but the *ennui*, the uncertainty as to the fate of all one’s friends and relations, or certainty worse still. Yet mine was not a very happy life.’

‘Was it not, dear mademoiselle?’

‘Ah, you wonder at that, *petite*! You see, we were too numerous in family, and though one daughter went into a convent, and another became a canoness, and so on, all that lessened the family resources; we were too well off to go into the order of La Miséricorde, where noble girls are received without a dowry, else that would have been our natural destination. As for me, I had another fate; but that does not matter.’

She paused, and her handsome face grew grave. Edmée kissed her hand, and said softly, ‘Only I do so like to hear!’

‘Ah, there is not much to tell, child; after all, perhaps it was rather that I disliked becoming a nun than that I loved my betrothed so well—I don’t know. Anyhow, I did not consent, though it was a hard battle, and I should hardly have had my way but for your godmother. That long waiting for one who never came, who never came back, was weary work; but her death was my sharpest sorrow. Still so young, so charming; she left my heart very empty.’

‘Yes,’ said Edmée, with full acquiescence; ‘but she has escaped all that has come since.’

‘That is true ; but death is terrible, child !’

‘Do you think so, mademoiselle ! Oh, it seems to me so much better to die than to live,’ said Edmée, colouring as she saw the astonishment on Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s face. ‘To escape from all the sorrow and pain, and having let those we love best go from our arms however fast we hold them and to stand in the light of Paradise, and know that we shall never leave it, and see our dear Lord face to face !’

There was such suppressed and eager enthusiasm in her look and tone that the older woman looked at her in silent amazement. Edmée was evidently speaking out of the depths of her heart. Evening had long closed in, and all was hushed in the street below ; a single candle dimly lighted the room where they sat. In the silence which followed Edmée’s words the tramp of approaching feet was heard without ; the two turned pale and looked at each other. The steps paused, and their hearts stood still too ; they expected in another moment to hear the imperative knock, and the dreaded summons, ‘Open in the name of the law !’ which preceded a domiciliary visit from the police. They heard Madame Lafarge open the house door and speak ; but the visit was not to them. After a short pause the tramp was again heard, receding down the street, as the party went off with a prisoner.

‘Not such death as that !’ murmured Edmée, with pale lips, shrinking up to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

‘Ah, child, what a difference the manner of it makes ! but to me death would always be terrible, and life sweet. You do not understand that, but it is so. Yes, if I lived as long as my poor old uncle, who lost his memory and always called us children by the names of brothers and sisters of his, dead and gone fifty years before ! Poor old man, I am glad that my nephew is not destined to lead the same sort of life as his, as he would have been but for the Revolution, and you, little one !’

Edmée averted the personal allusion by asking what sort of life.

‘Like that of all younger brothers of noble birth. Marriage was out of the question for them ; they became ecclesiastics, entered the army, went into a monastery. Those who remained in the world came home occasionally, and by-

and-by had a little pension from the king, and their slender portion of the family fortune, and lived in some corner of the eldest brother's house. My uncle had a room on the third-floor, good enough for Monsieur le Chevalier, you know, and as long as his strength allowed it, he went out shooting with the curé, played at cards and backgammon of an evening, and was very kind to us little ones. We were fond of the old man ; but nobody wanted or missed him, and I am sorry now when I think how dreary his last years must have been, after he got half-blind, and too feeble to crawl downstairs. I recollect how, if we ever went up to his room, we used to see him sitting in a great black leather armchair, his hands on his knees, dozing, or looking vaguely out of the window, as useless as the old sword which he had hung up on his bare walls.'

Edmée could not but own to herself that Alain might find life happier with her than following in the steps of his great uncle. She listened to all which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan volunteered to tell about him with shy pleasure, though she could not bring herself to ask anything. In these dark days she found herself often contrasting his conduct towards her with that of De Pelven, and on this evening her suspicions had sprung up with renewed strength ; she saw that the truce between them had been but a feint before a harder battle than any they had yet fought.

CHAPTER XIV

A GAME OF CHESS.

CHRISTMAS came and went, and the New Year began, the saddest Christmas and New Year which France had ever known, heralded by the Constitutional Bishop of Paris, Godet, publicly renouncing Christianity before the Convention. Want increased enormously ; provisions were very scarce, and the emigration of the upper classes had thrown thousands whom they used to employ out of work. The violent measures of the Convention, obliging shop-keepers to

sell at a low price, while laying in their goods at a high one, only ruined the sellers, and did not in the end help the buyers. Bread-riots, sacking of shops, crowds besieging the Convention and clamouring for food and the lives of aristocrats became part of daily routine, and were too much a matter of course to startle anyone. The power of feeling acutely seemed worn out by the perpetual strain, unless indeed some sudden news aroused it for a time, such as a massacre in the prisons, the trial and death of some very eminent person, or a victory on the frontiers, for in all the anarchy and poverty, France was holding her enemies valiantly at bay, and national pride and patriotism rejoiced amid the deep misery at the successes of the armies hastily raised, and mainly composed of untrained recruits, but giving promise of the glory which Bonaparte, as yet hardly known, was to win with them. Théroigne Lafarge attended her club assiduously (women and children had their clubs now, which backed up the worst of the Jacobins, and often overcrowded the Convention itself), and she was one of its favourite orators. Through her, intelligence of the horrible state of the prisons and the intolerable insults to which women were subjected by the gaolers reached her father-in-law, who detailed them to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. Sometimes he would have to report how the 'Société Révolutionnaire' intended to support a motion of Collot d'Herbois, for blowing up all the captives in the Conciergeries, by way of getting rid of them the sooner; sometimes that a civic ceremony had been commanded, at which all the members of the female clubs, with those of 'Les Enfants Rouges'—children from twelve to fourteen years old—should appear, preceded by their banner, which bore for its inscription, 'They have swept tyrants away before them.' Mademoiselle de St. Aignan listened with mingled fascination and disgust. 'What! more news of those paid furies!' she would say, and shrug her shoulders with a smile of contempt and aversion, not unmingled with amusement, if she were looking out of the window when the citoyenne Lafarge issued forth, in red pantaloons and tricolour cockade in the *bonnet rouge* which matched the nether garments, on her way to hold forth at St. Eustache, where her club sat, or to stand among 'les insulteuses,' who made it their business to deride the prisoners on their way to execution, or take her place among 'les

tricoteuses de Robespierre,' on the steps of the guillotine. Robespierre, however, was not violent enough for such women as she; Chaumette and Hébert were their idols, and the vile newspaper known as 'Le Père Duchesne,' edited by the latter, their favourite literature. Edmée shuddered at the very sound of her voice, and never went out without trembling lest, like many other innocent young girls, she should be seized and beaten by these wretched women, under the pretext that their captive wore some unpopular colour, or had no tricolour cockade. She wondered how long Madame Lafarge would tolerate her, and if indeed no other refuge could have been found but her house. If she could have read De Pelven's heart she would have known that his secret hope had been that the contrast between his apartment and this dismal lodging would incline both Edmée and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to accept his protection on his own terms. But Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had fully believed his assertion that he could find nothing better, and accepted the situation with her imperturbable good-humour, and Edmée feared him almost more than she did Théroigne Lafarge. He had felt his own head sit very loosely on his shoulders many and many a time of late, yet it was keen enjoyment to him to deal with the dangers and difficulties around him, and feel that after all he was master of the situation. Seeing further ahead than anyone else, unless perhaps Robespierre, he detected signs which told that the flood-tide of crime and misery had almost reached the highest mark possible, and that he should have to steer his vessel in an ebb perhaps as furious. Absorbed in the events rapidly succeeding each other, he had visited his protégées but rarely for some time, and was proportionably welcomed by Mademoiselle de St. Aignan when at last he appeared, in the gathering dark of a February evening; he never came until daylight had waned. She challenged him at once to a game of chess, and bade Edmée indulge in the unwonted luxury of two candles, one of which cast its flickering light on the board, the other Edmée drew close to her lace-pillow. She had set out a supper of bread and a little ham on the table; eggs and meat and butter had long been beyond their means, being at panic price, but the bread and ham she had bought with the money brought her by old Lafarge, who had somehow disposed of a piece of her lace, and she did not ask what percentage he

had kept for himself, too happy as she was to contribute to the maintenance of the *ménage*. De Pelven had offered a bottle of wine, and was now doing his best to conquer Made-moiselle de St. Aignan, who played a bold dashing game, and was almost his match, but always ended by making some sudden blunder, and falling into the snare of his long and patient combinations. Her interest in the game was divided by her desire to discuss public events, the all-absorbing topic of those days, when literature, family life, and religion seemed swept away.

‘So the bloodhounds are at each others’ throats!’ she said, with the imprudent openness which kept Edmée in constant alarm. ‘It seems that Danton and La Montagne are at daggers drawn. That is good news for honest people.’

‘My cousin, I fear that your honest people would say I was one of those bloodhounds,’ said De Pelven, advancing a harmless-looking pawn.

‘Nonsense! you have a craze on that score,’ said Made-moiselle de St. Aignan, who was rather wilfully blind to De Pelven’s political opinions, while she rashly fell into the snare laid for her, and lost a bishop by overlooking the pawn, in her desire to prove him better than he deserved. ‘After all, you are a man of good birth, and never can forget it.’

‘No, nor can others, unfortunately,’ he answered ruefully, thinking how much danger that fact had brought him into, and how often it was cast up against him.

‘No; your very dress betrays it. You cannot bring yourself to go about in sabots and rags and a hideous car-magnole; you wear lace ruffles and an embroidered waistcoat like a gentleman.’

‘So does your *bête noire*, Maximilien Robespierre, dear cousin.’

‘Really! I think the better of him then. There is a great deal in clothes. How much it meant when, after *Paul et Virginie* was acted, people took to muslin and simplicity, and how vastly the Court lost in the eyes of the vulgar when stately toilettes were exchanged for a *bourgeois* plainness of attire! As for you, never, I am convinced, would you feel it possible to come before ladies unless dressed as becomes a well-born man—you could not, my dear De Pelven!’

‘You are right, as always,’ said De Pelven, glancing at Edmée, and acknowledging to himself that, be the risk what

it might, he could never have brought himself to appear in her presence except in the garb of a gentleman.

'I suppose that the question is indiscreet,' pursued Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, 'but I do very much wonder how you contrive to float safely in these times, cousin. One never, thank Heaven, sees your name as an orator among those monsters at the Convention or the clubs; you propose no measures, you take no apparent part in politics, yet you seem well acquainted with these inhuman wretches who have nothing of men but the form; you have influence with them, it seems, you, a man of noble family, an aristocrat!'

'My cousin, your queen is in danger. Chess, like politics, requires all one's attention.'

'But what can a man like you have in common with them?' she persisted. 'You came to Mortemart to unravel some plot, you said is that work for a gentleman? Does it not involve spies and denunciations, and things impossible for a man of honour?'

De Pelven paused, considered his move, and then answered, while she was exclaiming at the disadvantage at which she suddenly found herself placed, 'My dear friend, you would not comprehend me if I tried to explain the exquisite pleasure which there is in calculating all the movements of an adversary; of foreseeing what he will do; the chances of his next move and yours, of leading him subtly in the direction favourable to your designs; of baffling his plans before he suspects you of having divined them. It is a pleasure entirely abstract; you play for the interest of the game, and therefore it is equally great whatever he may be seeking to do. It is not for or against this or that course which you are working; it is to win in a contest of skill, in which you are pitted against someone who becomes your enemy simply because in that game he chances to be your opponent. You have no personal feeling against him or his cause; you defeat him because it is necessary to your success.'

'I do not understand a word you are saying!' cried Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; 'is it of chess or politics that you are talking?'

'I told you, dear cousin, that we should not understand each other,' he answered serenely. 'This game, at all events, is mine; is it not?'

'But, monsieur,' said Edmée, while Mademoiselle de St.

Aignan was holding up her hands in dismay at this unexpected announcement, 'what becomes of those who are ill-advised enough to foil you?'

She very rarely addressed him, and he was taken by surprise.

'I think, mademoiselle, that it has somehow or other so rarely happened to me that I can scarcely answer that question.'

'No, I suppose that it very rarely happens,' said Edmée, as if to herself. 'Thank you, monsieur, I know now why you are indispensable to Robespierre.'

De Pelven had been led away by a strong desire to see whether, as often happened, she divined his secret meaning; yet he had not anticipated that she would do so; and he could have cursed his folly in letting her have this glimpse of his real self. He set his teeth hard at the undisguised contempt in her voice.

'If you look on me as a vulgar police-spy you are boundlessly mistaken,' he said, half-aside. 'I am no Fouché though indeed Fouché'—he had recovered his usual calm and ironical tone—'though indeed Fouché, with the talents he has, is more likely to rise high than any man I know. He will be even more indispensable under a despotism than in our present state of chaos, and a despotism must necessarily be the next step if anyone rise up who can master this anarchy. Ah, my dear cousin, I must not allow myself the pleasure of another game with you; I must go, and I fear that I shall not see you again for some time. I am going down to Brittany; it seems that things have been pushed too far there; Carrier has been making mistakes, and I am commissioned to look into it, and send a report to Paris.'

If Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could but have guessed what De Pelven gently designated as 'mistakes'!

'How, my cousin, you are leaving Paris! That is indeed ill news, and assuredly we have had enough of that already.'

'I thank you for feeling it ill news. It is indeed not willingly that I leave you. But have no fear while I am gone; here is a protection from Robespierre and another from Danton, extending over five weeks, and——'

'A protection from Robespierre and Danton!' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, colouring high. 'Do you think I will consent to be indebted to those monsters? Do you take me

for some Madame de St. Amaranthe, who buys her safety by frequenting their houses, and conducting her young daughter there? *I* receive a favour from your *sans-culottes*! I!’

‘There are very few people who would not kneel to Hébert himself for such a paper as this, my cousin. And recollect you have someone besides yourself to think of.’

‘My aunt speaks for us both, monsieur,’ said Edmée.

‘No, no,’ interrupted Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, hastily. ‘Heaven forgive me, I forgot the child! I accept, De Pelven, I accept. What! refuse anything which keeps her out of those prisons! Death is little compared with the treatment she would encounter. Not another word, Edmée; it secures you, and I am grateful.’

Edmée had never known till now how dear she had become to Alain’s aunt, and her eyes filled with tears.

‘I am an *ingrate*, cousin; is it not so?’ Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was saying, resuming her gay tone. ‘But you will understand and pardon. What, you have something to say to me? Speak out this child and I have no secrets from each other.’

De Pelven could have told her if he would that she by no means knew all Edmée’s secrets. ‘What I have to say concerns a friend of mine,’ he answered; and Edmée at once withdrew into the next room. The conference was not long, but she heard a sharp exclamation from Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and De Pelven’s low persuasive tones, answered briefly enough. Then he went away, speaking to Madame Lafarge, who never failed to be hanging about, listening at the doors, Edmée believed, when he was in the house. ‘For five weeks!’ she heard the woman say; ‘and then?’ but she did not wait to overhear more, and returned to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who seemed agitated, but not very ready to explain the cause. Presently, however, she said, ‘*Petite*, you do not guess what De Pelven had to say? No?—how should you! It seems that a friend of his, a most desirable *parti*, wants a wife. You understand? He thought of you, it appears. It was, doubtless, kindly meant; but I made it clear that you were Alain’s wife, and that such a proposal would be an insult if repeated.’

‘Ah! . . . And he looks on you as an obstacle in the way of his plans?’

‘What a strange way of putting it, child! One would

think you mistrusted this good De Pelven, who has ventured so much to protect us !'

'He warned us he should ask for payment in full some day, mademoiselle !'

CHAPTER XV

THE BLOW FALLS.

'SAFE for five weeks !' Edmée used often to repeat to herself, through the time which followed De Pelven's departure. 'But then——?'

For Edmée could not shake off the conviction that De Pelven had only put forward a man of straw in the 'friend' of whom he had spoken to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and merely sought to ascertain whether he should find in her an opponent or a friend in his proposals for Edmée. Now that she had expressed her view of the matter, no doubt with her usual frankness, he would look on her as an adversary, to be got out of the way. Sometimes Edmée shrank affrighted as the end of those weeks approached ; sometimes she felt an almost ungovernable impatience to have them over and know the worst. 'If our fate be death, give light and let us die,' was often the unuttered cry of her heart. She had frequently asked herself whether or not to tell Mademoiselle de St. Aignan what had passed between her and De Pelven, but she could not endure to bring additional harass upon her, and deprive her of a sense of security which, if false, was nevertheless consoling, and then maiden pride and modesty silenced the confession to Alain's aunt that another man had pursued her with his love, and almost won her heart before she knew her own feelings. Perhaps too Mademoiselle de St. Aignan would think it all only the foolish, unauthorised fancy of a silly girl, mistaking kindness for admiration. And Edmée never could bring herself to utter the words which often rose to her lips when De Pelven was named between them. The incessant inward conflict told on her, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan saw with concern how thin and white she grew

‘You stoop too much over your painting,’ she would say; ‘or else you are toiling over that lace-pillow. Come and read something to me; I do not say talk, for what is there to say? and besides, if we talk you continue your work. Come here, *petite*, and read me a little more of Racine, which our good De Pelven procured for us before he left us.’

Edmée came, but she could not bear the kind, scrutinising look bent upon her, and hid her face on Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s shoulder, clasping her dress fast unperceived, as if involuntarily trying to keep her from being torn away, but the next instant she loosed it, murmuring unheard, ‘What is the use? what is the use? Can I keep her if I hold her ever so tight? I shall have to let her go.’

‘Yet it was with as steady a voice as if in that brief space she had not passed through a paroxysm of anguish that she began to read at the passage which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had found for her. They were in the midst of ‘Britannicus,’ and she read the fine lines spoken by Burrus to Nero:—

Il vous faudra courir de crime en crime,
Soutenir vos rigueurs par d’autres cruautés,
Et laver dans le sang vos bras ensanglantés :
Vous allumez un feu qui ne pourra s’éteindre,
Craint de tout l’univers, il vous faudra tout craindre,
Toujours punir, toujours trembler dans vos projets,
Et pour vos ennemis compter tous vos sujets.

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan took the book from them, and read them again, saying, ‘Truly the poet and the prophet are one! Is it not wonderfully applicable to the present times? What a picture! You and I have been marvellously spared, *petite*; I begin to think that after all we shall escape, especially as we may soon expect our kind protector back. Perhaps this very evening we shall see him, and hear what he has been doing in Brittany. This brave La Vendée—’

‘Hark!’ said Edmée, dropping the book. ‘Ah, mademoiselle!’

Loud voices and steps were on the stairs, those of Madame Lafarge among them; they heard the malignant ring of satisfaction in her shrill tones, and knew at once what was at hand.

'So it has come! But we have that paper; courage, dear one,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. 'But if that should not avail, and if happily they only seek me, I forbid you—do you hear?—I forbid you to endanger yourself.'

There was no time for more; Madame Lafarge pushed the door open, exclaiming, 'There you have them, citizen municipals; there are the *ci-devants* whom you seek. Let my house be purged from these vile aristocrats.'

One of the men advanced; the other was looking round, and making a mental inventory of the furniture, probably with a view to confiscation.

'You are Valentine Aignan?'

'My name is Valentine Marie de St. Aignan.'

'There are no Des and no Saints now. You are accused of being a carnivorous aristocrat, and our orders are to arrest you.'

'Alas, citizen, nature and birth are answerable for both those sins! But allow me to say that we have a protection signed by Robespierre and Danton.'

'That is a lie! Maximilien and Danton give no protections to *ci-devants*.'

'But look, look!' Edmée cried, laying the paper before him.

'Hum! it seems so,' said the man, disappointed, and turning angrily on Madame Lafarge—'why do you then denounce this woman at the section, and give honest people the trouble of coming here for nothing?'

'Because the protection expired yesterday,' said she, with a smile of triumph. 'See the date!'

Involuntarily all looked at the paper outspread on the table. It was true; the time over which it extended had elapsed. Edmée stood looking in dumb despair at Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, while the guard who had taken the leading part struck the paper with his outspread hand, and said with a laugh, 'You are sharper than I thought, citoyenne Lafarge, and this *ci-devant* will come along with us. March, then, *canaille* of an aristocrat!'

'Will you let me put up a few necessities?'

'The nation provides all that is necessary for its prisoners, and I wager that you will not want anything long. Come, I say, is our time to be wasted in waiting for such as you?'

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan rose up. She dreaded death intensely, as she had once said, and she had not the faith

which strengthened Edmée, for the breath of the century had passed over her, yet she met her fate, as thousands of others did, with unshaken courage, and a serene brow. Without looking at Edmée, lest even a farewell glance should call attention to her, she followed her captors; Edmée heard her ask as she passed out, 'Where are you taking me?' and the harsh answer, 'You will know soon enough.' They paid no attention to Edmée, and Madame Lafarge had been struggling all along with her vehement desire to point her out. Some force seemed restraining her, but now her hatred proved too strong, and she seized the arm of the last guard, exclaiming, 'The girl—are you not going to take her too?'

'Oh, as for that, we have no orders, and if there should be any mistake, since it would seem that these *ci-devants* know Robespierre, it may be as well to have left one. Listen, then, you!' to Edmée, who stood as if turned to stone, gazing towards the door through which her friend had gone, as if she had already seen the grave close over her. 'You are under surveillance, you understand. The citizen Lafarge' (old Lafarge had crept into the room with them) 'will eat with you, drink with you, and live with you.' And he followed the rest.

'There! at least I shall no longer have the expense of maintaining thee, thou rabbits'-brains!' said Madame Lafarge, to the old man. 'And as for thee!' casting a look of hatred on Edmée, 'thy turn will come yet.'

She marched out; old Lafarge listened timidly until the sound of her steps had ceased, then shut the door, and sat down on a sofa bought by Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. Presently he got up, and tried an arm-chair, then returning to the sofa, 'It is difficult to choose!' he said, with a sigh. 'They are both great inventions. Ah, I shall be very comfortable here!'

Edmée's stupor of grief made no impression on him; perhaps he did not perceive it.

'It was very disagreeable down in her room,' he went on talking to himself. 'No peace from her tongue, and then her friends come in with their horrible tales, and sit and drink; no one wants the old man there; this is much better. But I wish I knew which was most comfortable.' And he got up and settled himself again in the arm-chair. 'You are young; you do not need luxuries,' he added to Edmée

The sound of his voice, though not the words, reached her. 'Where will they take her?' she asked, so suddenly that he started, and said peevishly, 'There is no need to startle one so. Nobody has any thought for the old. Take her? oh, the citoyenne Valentine; how should I know? There are so many prisons.'

'You must find out. That woman, your daughter-in-law, will know. You must learn it for me, do you hear? and also if the citoyen Pelven be returned.'

Edmée spoke so imperiously that Lafarge looked quite cowed. 'She is no better after all than my *fillâtre*!' he muttered. 'And I thought I should be so comfortable here! Well, well, I daresay I can learn, if you really must know, but it is taking trouble for nothing, since no one is allowed to see a prisoner; the orders are stricter than ever.'

But if I knew where she was I could send her some clothes, some bedding.'

And Edmée hastily began to make up a parcel, aware that it was impossible to procure any comforts whatever in the prisons, unless at exorbitant prices.

Lafarge looked on, but when it was done observed, 'It is a pity that you took all that trouble, for these things are the property of the nation, and I am in charge of them.'

'How! we bought them, and she could take nothing?'

'It is unfortunate, but I am responsible to the nation,' answered the old man, drawing up his meagre person with a gesture of proud satisfaction in the dignity conferred upon him. 'Besides, what would Théroigne say!' and he shook his head over this unanswerable argument. Edmée gave in; there was nothing else to be done, and by-and-by he grew communicative, as he found himself increasingly comfortable and at home, and became almost affectionate. She heard nothing of what he was saying, and scarcely knew what she did when complying with his demand for money to buy provisions for their joint dinner, only she felt that he had gone out, and left her in solitude, and then she laid her head on her arms, and tried to think out some course of proceeding. It was rather the sense that she was no longer alone than any sound or movement which made her suddenly look up. De Pelven was standing by her, his eyes fixed on her, and genuine compassion in his countenance. 'My poor child! how you have suffered!' he exclaimed as he saw the white

and faded cheek and tearless eyes raised unflinchingly to his own. 'I have but last night returned, and I learn that our poor friend has been arrested! But for a fatal, unavoidable delay I should have been here before the protection which I gave you had expired. By what miserable chance did this occur?'

'Monsieur, that you must ask the woman in whose house you placed us.'

'You are mistaken. She was aware that you were under the ægis of Robespierre; I took care of that.'

'And aware too of the very day on which it ceased to serve us. You took care of that also. Oh, do not deny it, monsieur, for I should not believe you.'

'You think, then, that I have allowed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to be arrested?'

'I do. She was an obstacle in your path, and you brushed it away.'

'As I would anything, anyone, who stood between us,' he answered, with passion intensified by the strength with which he repressed it. 'Child! I would break you yourself if I could not make you yield otherwise. Do you know the old story of the slight vase which floated down a stream in company with a brazen jar? There is your history, unless you will hear reason,' and she saw the fierce and dangerous gleam in his eye. 'Do you think you can measure yourself against me?' he continued, as if he understood how inwardly and in silence she was rallying all her powers of resistance, and though her spirit was rising in indomitable revolt she trembled at the increasing vehemence of his tone, and the look in his face. 'Foolish one! many who were strong in their day have tried it, and where are they? Listen, Edmée. I do not speak to you of my love, you know it, and only shrink the more from me; I tell you, whether you love me or abhor me it is all one, you must yield, but if you yield voluntarily, without delay, I will save Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.'

'You will do that?' she said, with a cry of anguish and uncertainty.

'I swear it. And what is more, to me the thing is a farce, an idle form, but if that satisfy you, I will make you my wife in the way you think essential, I will find a priest—it has been done before now'—he was thinking of Danton's

strange second marriage. 'Are you satisfied? You silly child, what is it in you that bewitches me?' he added impatiently, and stood looking at her, waiting for her answer. It was long in coming.

'Where is Mademoiselle de St. Aignan?' she asked at last.

'Probably in the Luxembourg.'

'Ah!' and then, after another long pause, 'Give me till to-morrow to consider.'

"*Femme qui écoute et ville qui parle sont perdues*," he muttered to himself. 'So be it. Have pity on yourself, Edmée; why cannot you love me? Ah, once mine, and I swear you shall do so!' He stooped over her, but she started away from his touch with a movement of fear and horror.

'So!' he said, at once recovering his usual cynical tranquillity, 'it is to be war between us, then?'

'I did not say that, but give me one day; it is not much to ask.'

'You think so? It is all that stands between life and death with many a one at this moment. One day, then, Edmée!'

'You assure me that nothing shall happen to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan in that time?' she cried, struck with a sudden thought.

'What! you think I might treat you as some *spirituel* monarch did his enemy's son, and buy what I want with a dead body? No, I will deal fairly by you. Adieu then, until to-morrow evening, when I will come and learn your decision. Be well assured that the Chevalier would not thank you for allowing an imaginary bond between you and him to prevent your saving the life of his dearest relative.'

He had gone, and a long time had passed, yet Edmée still sat where he had left her, with hidden face, fighting out a cruel battle, where generosity, self-sacrifice, perhaps duty itself, seemed arrayed on the side of wrong, and only the voice of her heart and of honour spoke on the other side. Those last words of De Pelven's rang in her ears. Assuredly Alain could not wish her, for the sake of a tie unsought and unwelcome, to refuse to redeem the life of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, the relative so beloved by him, so good, so dear to her!

‘And she would like to live! Oh, if it had been I whom they took, but she would like so much to live! There are so many who would be glad to die, while she—Oh, what shall I do? After all, who would suffer but myself?’ murmured the girl, to whom the cup of life had hitherto offered little but bitterness. But still the inward voice answered stubbornly, ‘I cannot do it,’ and the battle was still unfought, though she was exhausted into a dull calm, when old Lafarge came back, loaded with provisions, which he had laid in unstintedly, with the enjoyment of one spending money not his own. After spreading them out triumphantly, he observed, ‘My daughter-in-law says that the citoyenne Valentine is in the Luxembourg. I do not object to your going out by-and-by after you have got our dinner ready, and Théroigne is at her club; the prisoners often stand at the windows, and you might get a sight of her. Théroigne would have me keep you a close prisoner, but I will not be always ordered by her; I am here as the representative of the nation, and shall do as I please, only you must wait till she is gone out—and you need not mention to her that you have quitted the house—you understand?’ he said, much divided between the desire of emancipating himself on the strength of ‘his little brief authority,’ and his habitual fear of his formidable *fillâtre*.

‘In the Luxembourg! He told me the truth then. And I may perhaps see her!’ Edmée said to herself—‘see her dear face, and let her know that I am with her in heart. At least I can try, and I need not make up my mind to-day.’

The poor chance of a distant glimpse of the captive had put new life into her; there seemed a check in the rising tide of misfortune, and hope rose up, unreasonable, immortal, in her breast.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE prisons had never been so full as at this moment. Such legal formalities as had hitherto been observed were now cast aside; the accused were no longer allowed an advocate at

their trial, and the court which judged them was bidden to observe no law but 'that of their conscience, enlightened by patriotism, to the end that the Republic might triumph, and its enemies perish.' Fifty or sixty prisoners, from all parts of Paris, were daily condemned and carried away in the same afternoon to be guillotined. The accusation of having conspired in prison was now the favourite charge against them, and the miserable captives knew that they were surrounded by spies, ready to falsify their most innocent words, and denounce them. The extremes of French society were crowded together; rich and poor, bad and good, high and low. The Revolution had become a war of class against class; in every rank men tried to destroy those a step above them; the crimes of 1793 had dishonoured the great movement of 1789, and fatally involved it with the name and doctrines of the Jacobins. It only remained, as some demagogue had urged, to erect a stone guillotine opposite the Tuileries, that it might become a public and national movement.

The hour of four was the favourite one for executions. As usual at that hour Madame Lafarge went out, and Edmée, for once indifferent to the fear which had until now always haunted her of meeting those lugubrious death-carts with their freight of young and old, availed herself of her keeper's permission, and went out also, absorbed in the hope of seeing, if but once more, the face which had grown so dear to her. She paused as she crossed a bridge over the Seine, however, fancying that someone had spoken her name. It was only fancy, but, recalled to the scene around her, she looked up and down the river, shuddering. The sun was low, and cast a sinister light on the Tuileries and the Louvre; the stream ran red under the bridge. Edmée hurried on, turning away her eyes. She heard a man leaning on the parapet mutter, 'The very river rolls blood! Blood on the earth, on the sky, in the water!' Her mind was full of the fear lest in the waning light she should not be able to distinguish anyone at the windows of the Luxembourg, but the words, and the accent of horror and remorse in which they were uttered, came back to her afterwards, and long haunted her ear. In the increasing cold of the March evening, far more like winter than coming spring, few people were abroad, and the leafless gardens of the Luxembourg were almost empty, but some

women and a few men were walking in them, and turning anxious strained glances towards the windows, where they hoped to see dear faces. Edmée could perceive that there were groups looking out, but so far above and away from the nearest spot to which she could approach that, as she had feared, in the dim twilight which had rapidly succeeded the lurid sunset, no one's features could be distinguished. She stood gazing up at the walls of the prison-palace, unable to give up this last hope, and feeling, as many and many others had done who like her had stood beneath them, as if her heart must break. Wild thoughts of bribing a jailor with all she had to admit her, of saying or doing something which should cause her to be imprisoned too came into her mind; she advanced so near as to be roughly ordered back by a sentinel, and made so little movement to obey that he pointed his gun at her, but lowered it with a half-laugh as someone, just come out of the palace, said, 'Nay, nay, citizen; there is no credit to be gained by hitting a mark so close as that! And 'tis only a child!'

Edmée fancied that the kind voice, which had a foreign accent, was not unknown to her; she turned to the speaker, and saw a young man, with a country air, and a plain, agreeable face; he carried a portfolio under his arm, and wore a very homely costume, which however had none of the studied raggedness and squalor aimed at by the extreme Republicans. On his side he studied her countenance with a considering and puzzled look; presently his face lighted up with pleased surprise, as he said in a low tone, 'You do not remember me? We met on the road to Mortemart.'

'Ah! is it possible!' cried Edmée, enchanted as if she had unexpectedly met a survivor of some shipwreck from which she had believed none but herself to have escaped. 'Yes, you said that you were going to Paris. You were going to learn painting. I recollect it all.'

The face of the young Swiss clouded, and it was with a sad and depressed air that he replied, 'That is not worth speaking of just now. Let us walk about the gardens; speak low, one never knows who may be listening, or where. Why are you here?'

'Alas! my aunt is imprisoned here.'

'Your aunt?'

'Yes—that is—' Edmée had of late grown so used to the

name that she had called her so unconsciously—'Madoiselle de St. Aignan.'

'Is it so? She was so kind to me!' said Balmat, with great concern. 'Since when is she a prisoner?'

'Only since this morning. Ah, it seems such a long time!'

'And are you alone, or is *he* with you?' asked Balmat, thinking of Alain.

'Quite alone now.'

Her voice quivered; his kind, grieved looks overset her self-command, and her loneliness seemed to fall all at once with a crushing weight upon her.

'You hoped, no doubt, to see her at some window. But I can do better than that for you; I can take her a message, and give you news of her.'

'You! It is possible, then, to enter the prisons?'

'For me, yes. I have a pass which admits me to all the prisons of Paris. One of our great patriots, who has a turn for art, and especially for beauty, desires to have a gallery of portraits of all the beautiful or remarkable people who are arrested, and I am making crayon likenesses for him.'

Edmée started in horror as Balmat said this, in his usual tranquil way; he perceived her start, and smiled.

'What!' she cried, 'you lend yourself to this? You abase your art to gratify such a monster as this man must be? You must be worse than he!'

'You would be less displeased, citoyenne, if you knew how many messages I am thus enabled to take backwards and forwards; how many families have now the portrait of someone whom they will never see again in life,' answered Balmat, quietly.

'Ah, forgive me! I did not understand, I was too hasty. To do all this you must constantly risk your life! Forgive me. And you will see my aunt; you will tell her how my heart is always with her; you must carry her this money——'

'No, no, only a few francs. You do not know how close a watch is kept upon the prisoners. If it were supposed that she had money about her she would lose it all. I did not see her to-day perhaps she is in the *entresol* above the excellent De Mouchys; she will probably see them——'

'You comfort me already! I can imagine where she is, and I have heard her speak of the *maréchal* and his wife. When shall you see her?'

‘To-morrow, I promise you. But now you must go home. See how dark it grows, and you are so thinly dressed!’ said Balmat, looking at the muslin cap, with the inevitable tricolour cockade, and the print dress covered with little bouquets, which was the costume adopted by Edmée since she came to Paris, as least remarkable. You have not even a shawl!’

‘I forgot to put it on.’

‘She would not be pleased at that! Come, let me see you home; where do you live?’

‘Home! Ah, if you knew!’

‘Yes, it must seem very empty, very desolate. But have you not seen him St. Aignan?’

‘Monsieur le Chevalier? Oh, he escaped to Switzerland; he did not come with us.’

‘I know that,’ said Balmat, turning out of the gardens; ‘but he returned to France after his father’s death. The Count was killed in a duel. I do not know the details, but he seems to have challenged someone who accused him of having caused some plot to fail by mismanagement. It seems that the Chevalier knew nothing of this plot, whatever it was, and thought it concerned his honour to return and justify himself to some friend or relation—De Pelven I think was the name.’

‘Yes, yes, and then?’

‘He crossed the frontier disguised as a carter, went to Mortemart, found you gone, no one knew where, came to Paris. This Pelven was absent, and he could learn nothing of his movements—you understand that it was necessary to observe the utmost caution for fear of arrest, and endangering those who had procured his passport when he emigrated. He therefore could do nothing but leave a letter for his friend, and, I believe, quitted Paris a week ago, intending to reach England, if possible.’

‘Holy Virgin! He returned to Paris! What madness! If De Pelven had been here! You are sure M. de St. Aignan is gone? And how do you know all this?’

‘Very simply; I understood from what he said before me to his aunt that he was going to Switzerland, and told him that if he would kindly inform my family of our meeting and of his aunt’s hospitality to me, they would serve him to the utmost of their power. Not well knowing where to go, he

and his father settled for some weeks in my village, in our house, in fact; and during that time they received a letter from me, saying where I lodged in Paris, and that David had allowed me to join his scholars all was new and hopeful then so when he came to Paris he sought me, and gave me news of my people.'

Edmée found herself led on in her turn to tell one thing after another until Balmat asked, 'Is there no one to whom you can apply in Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's behalf?'

'Only one, and he——'

'This Pelven who advised you to come here? who placed you in that house? Can you trust him?'

'Trust him!'

'What does he want of you?' asked Balmat, suddenly, and, as she did not answer, 'Pardon me, I had no right to ask.'

'I will tell you; I have no one to consult; perhaps you may help me,' she said, wearily. 'He says he loves me; he offers to marry me, to find a priest.'

'He does! Then his love is earnest, for the risk is tremendous. But are you free? Monsieur le Chevalier spoke of his aunt and his wife.'

'Yes, I am his wife by the new laws.'

'It stands thus, then; this De Pelven would marry you—and you?'

'It would save her life!'

'Ah, I begin to understand. That, then, is the condition. You can save her life if you commit a sin? For you think it a sin, do you not? But if that be the only way, it cannot be God's will that she should be saved.'

They walked on in silence. It seemed strange and startling in these times to hear a man thus simply refer a matter to God's will. Edmée felt as if she had found a plank to cling to on the troubled ocean upon which she was tossed, but her affection for Mademoiselle de St. Aignan made her slow to acknowledge him in the right. On the other hand, ever since De Pelven had pursued her with his love, Alain's claims had seemed more and more valid, and, unreasonable as it might be, the knowledge that he had so lately been near her, had sought her, strengthened the impression. They had not exchanged another word when they reached the bridge over which Edmée had come; the buildings on

either shore were now a dark indistinct mass of shadow ; the towers of Notre Dame rose dark in the distance, and the river flowed pale below, reflecting the rising moon. The man whom she had seen leaning on the parapet, wrapped in his cloak, was still there, now in close conversation with a companion. They moved as Edmée and Balmat approached, and walked away, arm in arm, and speaking low and rapidly. Balmat caught a glimpse of their faces : ‘Danton,’ he said in a whisper, ‘and Camille Desmoulins !’ and they looked after the two celebrated Republicans in silence, Balmat with indifference, Edmée with something like loathing, but neither guessing that a few days later both these men would be under sentence of death in the Conciergerie.

‘We must say good night,’ Edmée said at last. ‘You will see her to-morrow ?’

‘Certainly. But you cannot go home ; you must not throw yourself into the hands of this man. I shall take you to my lodging. I have a room in the house of an Auvergnate, rather fond of money—she scraped all she has up liard by liard, poor soul ; but you will be safe there. For a few assignats she will arrange about your papers with her section ; they are not a bad set, as times go, where we are, and she has a nephew who will manage it. Come.’

Edmée hesitated at this decisive step, but Balmat was resolute. ‘Do right, citoyenne, and leave the rest. She would never pardon your buying her life at such a price. That bird of prey shall not have the poor little dove !’ he added to himself, and finally Edmée yielded, with a sense of security in being overruled.

‘That is right,’ he said, as they diverged into a quarter of the city unknown to her, and remote from the one where she had been living. ‘Another day you might not have been allowed to leave the house, and how could I have conveyed news of our friend to you there ? By-the-by, what name will you be known by ? You say she called herself Valentine.’

‘I will be the citoyenne Alain,’ answered Edmée, blushing a little, while a smile came on her lips for the first time for many days.

‘A good name ! and we will say that your husband is seeking employment away from Paris ; that is quite true, and it is better that you should be known as a married woman ; it is more respectable,’ observed Balmat, contem-

plating with some dissatisfaction the girlish air of his companion. 'See, this is the house where I lodge.'

They had reached a narrow and gloomy street, and the house was an old dilapidated building, which its present possessor had bought at a rate which did not greatly tax her means. They went up a winding, steep staircase, after passing through a court as damp and dismal as a well, with a ruined fountain in the middle, and from the garret where Edmée found herself she could look into a neighbouring cemetery, full of desecrated, broken tombs. There was hardly any furniture, except a chair or two and a small bed, and, as if the extreme poverty of his dwelling for the first time struck Balmat, he said in a sorrowful, apologetic tone, 'I had not thought it was so poor a place; I do not know whether you can live here.'

'Oh yes! but you? You are giving me your own room.'

'I shall manage; I know where I can go for to-night, and to-morrow we shall see. Happily you have plenty of money, and can buy whatever you need.'

'It is all we have. I took it out, hoping somehow to get it to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. But I can make lace, and embroider muslin.'

'That is well; my landlady may be able to sell such things, for it seems that even now women buy and wear luxuries. I will call her.'

He went downstairs, leaving Edmée looking round her, with rather a sinking heart; but her spirits rose when he returned with his Auvergnate, whose face, though hard-featured, looked honest, and who seemed ready to show kindness to the girl, who was not aware of the charm which she possessed, and was joyfully surprised at the unexpected gentleness of this homely woman.

'No, no, to-night she shall sleep with me, and to-morrow we can settle where to put the poor little cabbage,' said she, in a dialect which Edmée found it hard to understand, though she comprehended the kind look and tone. 'Her aunt in prison, her husband away! Poor little girl! And she can pay her rent, thou say'st? That is well. Come then with me, my pretty one; thou hast a good friend in Jacques Balmat, and thou shalt have another in Madelon Crocq.'

She took Edmée's cold hand, and led her away to her own kitchen, setting food before her, and showing her a

rough tenderness which came like rain on thirsty ground to the weary girl, who took her hand suddenly, and put it to her lips, to the surprise of Madelon. 'Bon! bon!' said she, with tears starting to her eyes. 'Do not do that, pretty one; thou art like my sister Driette my poor Driette. I will do my best for thee, never fear.'

And Edmée fell asleep, thankful and almost hopeful, with very little consideration for the perplexity into which her non-return would throw old Lafarge.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOILED.

IN whatever form De Pelven had anticipated Edmée's decision, it had certainly not been in the shape of silence and vacancy, but when he came into her salon at the appointed time this was all that greeted him. The room was not indeed absolutely empty, for in one corner of the sofa dozed old Lafarge, his snuff-box slipping from his hand, and shedding its contents unperceived. De Pelven was not at first aware of his presence, for the room was almost dark, and he stood looking round wondering, unable to grasp the situation; then he became aware that there was someone cowering among the cushions, and stepped eagerly forward, only to be speedily undeceived by perceiving something very unlike Edmée. 'Where is the citoyenne?' he asked, in a tone of considerable anger, though indeed his disappointment was not the old man's fault.

'I have said fifty times that I cannot tell,' answered poor Lafarge querulously, aroused from slumbers in which he had happily forgotten all the badgering to which his daughter-in-law had subjected him ever since she had discovered Edmée's disappearance.

'Cannot tell! When did she go out?'

'Yesterday.'

'How? She went out yesterday, and you have not seen her since? Where did she go?'

'You should know that best, since my *fillâtre* says she went to you, and a red ass could not be worse tempered than

that Théroigne ever since. It is a dog's life that I lead with her ; I will never be tender-hearted again—but who could have supposed that girl so *égoïste* ? I let her out because she begged and prayed and wept,' said Lafarge, drawing largely on such imagination as he possessed ; ' so at last I allowed her to go——'

' Had you let her fancy herself under surveillance then ? —put it into her head that she was a prisoner ? *Sacrebleu !*' said De Pelven, grinding his teeth. ' What a misfortune it is to have to use fools ! Where is your daughter-in-law ?'

' Downstairs, as far as I know,' replied Lafarge sulkily, as he tried to scrape up the snuff, which had scattered itself over the sofa.

' Tell her to come here at once ;' and, unwelcome as the command was, he did not venture to disobey, and went away slowly, muttering to himself, while De Pelven struck a light, put it to a lamp, and then stood looking round with keen scrutiny. There was no token of a preconcerted flight ; on the contrary everything testified that no preparations had been made, and that Edmée must have intended to return. Her paint-box lay open, a drawing was half-finished beside it, her lace-pillow was on a chair, just as he had seen it all when he entered after the arrest of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. Only the bowed, girlish figure, leaning with hidden face over the table, was absent. Memory brought back the look in those sad eyes when at last she had lifted it. ' Heavens ! where can she be ?' he thought, pierced through and through with the anguish of apprehension and perplexity. ' Gone since yesterday ! And she knew no one in the whole city, unless——' His very lips turned livid ; the thought occurred to him that Alain, whose presence he had learned by the letter which he had found on his return from Nantes, might after all have remained in Paris. ' Is it so ?' he said, half aloud. ' Has he found her ? I will know that before this week is over, or own myself as great an imbecile as that old idiot himself, and this time she will not escape me. Still in Paris ! If so, his head shall fall into the basket, unless mine roll there first. So, citoyenne,' as Madame Lafarge came in, with a red flush on her handsome face, and eyes ablaze, ' you have let her go !'

' Have you the insolence to feign that you do not know where she is, then ?' returned the woman, violently. ' Do

you think I have not seen your game all along? Am I a simpleton, or blind, or deaf? Bah! à d'autres! Théroigne Lafarge is not so easily deceived, *va!*'

'I tell you I know nothing; but you are answerable for her, and I call on you to explain what has happened. I left her here two days ago——'

'And yesterday, since you pretend to want details, declaring that she was going to the Luxembourg, that old stockfish Lafarge allowed her to——'

'What! she said then that she was going to the Luxembourg gardens!' exclaimed De Pelven, who now began to fear that through some imprudence, intentional or otherwise, Edmée had been arrested.

Théroigne looked at him in extreme surprise, and a vivid satisfaction flashed over her flushed, handsome face. 'You really are ignorant of her whereabouts?' she asked, between suspicion and joy. 'She really is not with you, then? If you dare to deceive me, you know what to expect!' she added, clenching and brandishing her fist. De Pelven paid her no attention. He was deep in thought.

'Look here,' he said presently. 'You have made a mistake in not warning me of her absence. Take care that you do not make another, or you will suffer for it. If she come back you will receive her kindly, and ask no questions; but let me know at once—at once, do you hear?'

The sullen crimson flush mounted again to the virago's brow. 'I have had enough of these aristocrats already,' she answered savagely. 'The neighbours begin to talk.'

'You will do as you are told,' said De Pelven, looking at her, and speaking in the quiet, peremptory tone of one who never admits that it is possible for anyone to disobey him. 'You have your instructions, and will act accordingly.'

'The citizen Pelven forgets that we are all equal now,' she retorted, jealousy again getting the upper hand. 'If I chose to tell anyone that he has been concealing two aristocrats under false names for the last five months what is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh, and for all he chooses to say he belongs to the *ci-devants* himself——'

'And suppose you did say all this?' said De Pelven, with the same fixed and steady look. 'Suppose you were so unadvised as to say it?' he repeated, as she made no immediate answer.

She quailed visibly, but glared at him savagely. 'Why, then the citizen might find that when one has only one head to throw away, it is better to be friends with Théroigne Lafarge.'

'Take the warning home to yourself,' he answered calmly. 'If we were not friends, should I have placed these women under your surveillance, and trusted you to report all they did to me?'

'That is true — after all, when she is here I know what passes,' said Théroigne, in a milder tone.

'Yes, and I prefer to be your friend than to be forced to be your enemy, citoyenne.'

There was a softening in his voice like a caress, and as she looked at him he smiled. The woman was one of the furies of the Revolution, coarse and passionate, with an instinctive desire to pull down everything richer, better, purer than herself, and a boundless hatred of the upper classes, yet this refined man of the world was a sort of demi-god to her; she worshipped him, and crouched before him as a panther might before the keeper whom it both loved and feared, and nevertheless might some day spring upon and rend to pieces. She had been invaluable to him as a means of influencing her club, and her information of the intentions and movements of the faubourgs had gone not a little way in gaining for him that reputation for foresight and knowledge of the mob which had made him essential to one leader after another in the Revolution. 'We are friends, my good Théroigne, are we not?' he repeated, and she answered, as if in spite of herself, 'It shall be as you choose.'

'I shall come here to-morrow. I want to know how the people will take Danton's arrest, if Robespierre decide on it.'

'You shall have news. After all, Théroigne Lafarge is of a little more use to you than that imbecile girl, who would rather be kissed by the holy guillotine than you!' she answered, with a glow of triumph in her eyes. 'The Dantonists brave us, it seems; they talk of mercy, of sparing innocent heads, vile poltroons!—is anyone innocent? The republic needs blood. Danton is a bad citizen; he is rich, he takes gold with both hands from anyone who likes to buy him; he has conspired with Dumouriez and the Brissotins! I do not love Robespierre, no! he stops short, he believes in a Supreme Being; what is that but a king, and therefore a tyrant under

another name, I ask you? We have dethroned both the kings of earth and the King of heaven! We want no divinity but ourselves. No monarchy above if we mean to have a republic below! But we cannot spare Maximilien, and since he and Danton cannot agree, Danton must die.'

De Pelven had listened with fixed attention, while the orator of the Société Révolutionnaire perorated with the vehement gestures so natural to her that she used them unconsciously. 'So!' he said. 'Then the faubourgs will not rise and deliver Danton, if he should call upon them?'

'The people will be angry, very angry; he is their idol, but they will do nothing. Do they ever deliver anyone? And they will perceive the strength of the Comité in its daring to strike Danton.'

'That is true. I thank you, my good friend; keep me informed how the pulse of the faubourgs beats.'

'And you will not fail to come to-morrow?'

'I will not fail.'

'You see that you cannot do without me! Do you want anything suggested to the Société? any plan supported?'

'On the contrary. I want merely to be sure which way the current is flowing. The Rue St. Honoré grows weary of the executions. The householders declare that the daily procession of the condemned disgusts lodgers, prevents the apartments from being let; I saw blinds studiously drawn down, and shops shut at four o'clock yesterday and to-day.'

'White-livered patriots,' exclaimed the indignant Théroigne. 'Let them beware! What! these aristocrats have oppressed us a thousand years, and a few months of bloodshed on our part seems too long?'

'If it were only the aristocrats,' suggested De Pelven.

'Whoever is richer than I, whoever has what I need and have not, is an aristocrat to me. What right has he to possess more than another? If the people are getting *blasé*, give them something to whet their appetites. Let more heads fall daily let that lazy pig Fouquier Tinville give us a spectacle. For me there is no sight so delightful as to see an aristocrat die!'

De Pelven went away full of thought which almost drove Edmée out of his mind. He had wide and anxious questions in hand; he was in the secret of Robespierre's intentions as to the Dantonists, and was taxing all his sagacity and knowledge of his native province of La Vendée to foresee the

tactics of the Royalist leaders, and advise the generals of the Republican troops sent down against them. Soon, however, his mind reverted whether he would or not to Edmée's disappearance. As long as Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was in the Luxembourg he thought that Edmée would not fail to visit the gardens, and for many days after he spent hours there, and set spies to watch in his absence, growing almost frenzied with irritation and anxiety as no news came. That she was not in the Luxembourg, in Les Carmes, in the Conciergerie or any of the other prisons he had ascertained, but if alive and free the problem was inexplicable why she remained unseen and unheard. Nor did it seem likely, if Alain had found her, that he should make no effort to learn anything of his aunt. Balmat's good sense was a match for De Pelven's subtle brains! He had foreseen this danger, and insisted that she should be content with such news as he could bring her of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, whom he contrived to see occasionally, having indeed free run of the prisons, and finding an excuse for visiting her in taking the portraits now of one, now another, of the changing inmates who shared her room and its single mattress. De Pelven, as he walked in the gardens, where leaves now began to open and turf to grow green with spring verdure, meditated on plans where hundreds of lives were concerned, and by which the politics not only of France but of Europe would be influenced, but always was on the alert for any sign of Edmée, but always in vain. Once he thought he had a glimpse of the slender young figure, but a second glance showed him that it was the heart-broken young wife of Camille Desmoulins, looking up with gestures of despair at the palace where her husband and Danton were now both captives. He went up to her and said softly, 'You can do him no good thus; go home; you have children, do not throw away your life.'

'What is it worth to me now?' she cried, turning upon him a face so worn and wild that he started at the change a few days had wrought; 'the cowards will murder me as they will my Camille; let them! they forget that a woman's blood swept the Tarquins from Rome!' and then, with a sudden, inconsistent, touching return to hope, she held up her finger to make him listen to the deep murmur of the crowd, kept back by the sentinels, but surging near the walls, to catch the sound of Danton's voice as he thundered an harangue as if in

the tribune, to his fellow-prisoners. 'Do you see? do you hear? the people gather; Danton is their idol; they will not let him perish, and he will save my husband. Yes, I will speak to them myself; I will remind them of all he has done for the cause of liberty, for mankind—they will not let my Camille die!'

The rosy colour flushed into her face; her sweet, appealing looks, her expressive gestures, her white dress and loosened hair gave her an indescribable charm, enhanced by the extreme youthfulness of her appearance. De Pelven shook his head, and with a few murmured words turned away, while she again gazed upwards at the windows, and clasped her hands with a cry of joy as she sprang forward, suddenly seeing the face which she sought pressed against the glass, with a sign of hand and head which showed her that she was seen.

'She is dangerous!' De Pelven thought, observing her from afar, for he did not care to be seen in lengthened communication with the wife of Desmoulins. 'If she were really to appeal to the people during the trial, it would be just the spark without which the powder will be threatening all dangerous possibilities, yet innocuous. Robespierre must be warned in time.'

And then, having brought his thoughts on public matters into shape and order, he gave a brief space to that problem of finding Edmée which daily exasperated and haunted him more and more persistently, until he found his cool and practised brain beginning to be over-mastered by the strain of a fixed idea which beset him sleeping or waking, while the suspicion that after all she was with Alain at times almost maddened him. He was no longer young; he was of an essentially cold temperament; he was one of those men whose destiny it is to give little and receive enormously, almost without the trouble of holding out his hand, but he had now plunged headlong into the flood of passion, and found himself carried away helpless.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'THE INCORRUPTIBLE.'

FOUR years earlier Maximilien Robespierre was only known as a lawyer of little promise, and by a few stilted verses, which he had published from time to time. Then, coming to Paris as a deputy to the National Assembly, he became noticed as a persistent speaker, whom as yet no one wished to hear. He was small, plain, with a penetrating voice, an unprepossessing manner, and was utterly insignificant in the eyes of all men. No one guessed that in this man was the soul of the Revolution, and that it would be, and justly, more closely associated in the future with his name than with that of Marat, Danton, Hébert, or Desmoulins. In those four years Robespierre had risen step by step into public notice, until by the spring of 1794 his name became at once the most popular and the most dreaded of any then in power. Danton was the favourite of the masses; they rejoiced in his stentorian eloquence; they understood and sympathised in his coarse vices; they embraced him as one of themselves, but Robespierre was mighty in the double and irresistible strength of a fanatic who always sees his goal and goes directly towards it, unimpeded by any scruples whatever, and of a man proved indifferent to any bribe, whether wealth, pleasure, power, or place. Such a phenomenon as was presented by this French puritan might well astound a nation accustomed to the shameless corruption of the higher classes, the unblushing misuse of public money, the unconcealed greed of the *fermiers généraux*, and the oppression of monopolies. Robespierre had held his own way, leading each party until it would go no further, then, sacrificing it, and leading on another. He had studiously held aloof from the massacres in the prison, and for such as Théroigne Lafarge 'did not go far enough,' since he carefully observed a legality in his manner of blood-shedding which the 'Septembriseurs' despised, but he never hesitated to cast the head of anyone, however close or dear to him, who impeded his schemes or dwarfed his pre-eminence, to the executioner. Living a life of Spartan simplicity in the house of an artisan, he pursued his course ruthless and tranquil, almost worshipped

by some who, though destined to be wounded to the quick by him, yet spoke of him half a century later as the type of virtue and incorruptibility, while to the greater part of mankind his name was never to be uttered without a shudder of loathing. De Pelven himself, by profession a student of character, looked with something like awe, though it would not have been De Pelven had not a tinge of contempt mingled with his feelings, on this strange product of the Revolution, the man of one idea, not sanguinary from actual delight in blood, like Marat, not animated by hatred against the sins and insolence of their class, like the Lameths, but, as the world instinctively felt, more to be dreaded, more to be condemned, than any of his fellow-republicans.

Very few were admitted into his intimacy ; he might, and indeed did, snatch a short time to spend in the evenings with the family in whose house he lived, one of whose daughters was his betrothed, but the man who uttered such innumerable speeches, who wrote even more than he spoke, who was incessantly consulted, implored, sought after, had little time for domestic life. Camille Desmoulins had been one of the friends to whom his door was always open, but the wavering, boasting, vehement Camille had crossed his path and thwarted his projects, and Robespierre knew him no more. Madame Roland was another, but her hour had also come. When De Pelven sought him in his garret, which looked out on a carpenter's yard, whence came an incessant sound of saws and hammers, he found him sitting as usual at a table loaded with reports, denunciations, pamphlets, a copy of the 'Contrat Social,' a bundle of the newspaper which Desmoulins had called 'le vieux Cordelier,' and a great heap of manuscripts, written in a small, careful hand, and much corrected. A volume of Rousseau lay open, close to his hand, and an early rose bloomed in a cup, among half-a-dozen letters lately finished. Before him was a sheet of paper, covered with names, which he was carefully considering, marking some with one pinprick, and others with two. Those with one prick were the names of people whom he suspected to be dangerous ; those with two such as he knew to be so. The marks to these last were so many death-warrants. He had just pricked the double sign against the name of Westermann, who had become suspiciously popular by his military exploits since the day when he first came into public notice as a leader in the

attack on the Tuileries of August 10, when De Pelven entered. As he heard his step, Robespierre raised his peculiar, deep-set eyes, and a pale, steely ray shot out of them. Neither of these men thoroughly understood the other, but to De Pelven Robespierre offered a study of singular interest, while to Robespierre De Pelven was a man as indifferent to bribes as himself, and endowed with extraordinary sagacity. Many a time, he knew, had De Pelven warned him of some unseen rock, some danger ahead, which otherwise would have shipwrecked him. He motioned him to take one of the four chairs which the room contained, and, while arranging his lace shirt-frill, waited for him to speak, looking at him through half-closed eyes, with a cat-like watchfulness.

'The Chouans are making hot work in Brittany,' observed De Pelven, seating himself. 'It seems that they have cut to pieces another of Thureau's garrison.'

'In spite of the amnesty which you urged our granting to the Vendéans!'

'La Vendée is quiet enough. Charette can do little there now. But you may remember I suggested that Carrier would make it slippery walking if he kept the streets ankle-deep in blood. There should be a certain measure in all things, and if the sheep are to be brought back willingly into the fold, it is not the butcher who should be sent to drive them.'

'You speak as Phélippeaux did, and Danton,' answered Robespierre, gloomily. 'This transfer of the war to Brittany is a great misfortune; by your report the country is likely to be singularly fatal to troops who do not know it, and the inhabitants brutally superstitious—the smugglers too, you declare, all Royalists! How is that? Who suffered more under the old régime?'

'They prefer known evils to unknown, it would seem.'

'Otherwise the political horizon is clearing, and Europe trembles before the glorious victories of our troops; but what of England?'

'There is danger brewing there.'

'What! more danger from those treacherous *insulaires*? 'asked Robespierre, quickly. 'What are they saying now in their Senate?'

'Not saying, but doing. One of our agents in London warns me that Puisage has opened communications with the English Government.'

‘And what will the effect be?’ asked Robespierre, with visible emotion.

‘Watch the coast well, and there will be no need to ask,’ replied De Pelven, drily. ‘Grant no permission to any *émigré* to return, have every man of mark among the exiles in England watched, and resolve either to let Brittany keep its priests and its customs unmolested, or exterminate the whole population.’

‘Thurreau’s infernal columns will look to that. Brittany is a hotbed of superstition and fanaticism; it must be purged by blood.’

‘It seems to me hardly consistent with our doctrine of perfect equality, but it is unquestionably happy for the war that the Convention passed that measure decreeing that every officer in command shall be able to read and write,’ remarked De Pelven, with a little sarcasm. ‘When I was in Anjou I saw two thoroughly well-planned expeditions fail. One because the commander mistook a river on the map for a road, and the other because a captain could not read the instructions sent him from head-quarters.’

‘Danton kept harping on the cruelties, as he called them, in Anjou and Poitou,’ said Robespierre, who seemed unable to keep the fallen Republican’s name out of the conversation. ‘He was becoming merciful, except indeed to me; I heard that he said, “If Maximilien dared attack me, I would tear out his heart with my own hands!” Is that true?’

De Pelven nodded. ‘Good! He said nearly the same thing in this very room. The colossus stood yonder, grasping that chair—see, he broke it!—gesticulating and declaiming as if he had been in the tribune, until it was evident——’

‘That he was too tall by a head,’ suggested De Pelven.

‘Just so. And therefore——’ He handed the long list of names to De Pelven, who lifted his eyebrows with an inquiring look at the name of General Westermann, but on Robespierre’s sign that the matter was decided, did not seem to think it worth discussion, and returned the paper, saying ‘Only one mark against Tallien? Beware of that man.’

‘Ah, he warned Danton—they came here together,’ said Robespierre, with a dangerous gleam in his pale, shifting blue eyes, and he leaned his pointed chin on his hand, and looked earnestly at De Pelven. ‘When they left me he urged Danton to go straight to the Convention and gain its

ear, but Danton said the time had not yet come." Tallien's time had not come either—yet.' And then, with a suppressed eagerness—'Do they talk of Danton much?'

'Assuredly, but a fortnight hence they will have forgotten him.'

'Is there anyone else who occupies men's minds?'

'Only yourself.'

Robespierre's face relaxed its habitual concentrated and anxious watchfulness; he smiled well pleased. 'Danton cast a mighty shadow,' he said, 'but soon he will not need more room in the ditch of the cemetery de Mousseaux than other people. It is curious! Hush, I hear someone.'

It was Duplay, the nephew of the joiner in whose house they were, and Robespierre's secretary. He brought a letter, and laid it before Robespierre, saying, 'It is said to be urgent,' and withdrew.

Robespierre loved no auditors, when he and De Pelven were together, not even Simon Duplay, or his betrothed, Cornélia, who worshipped him. De Pelven knew the handwriting, and watched him with close and curious attention, while he read the rash, impetuous, pathetic appeal in which Lucile Desmoulins alternately recalled old kindly memories, and upbraided the false friend, and yet could not believe that he would let her husband perish.

'A true woman's letter!' was his only comment, as he laid it down, so that his companion might read it if he thought it worth while to give his time to such a trifle. De Pelven did think it worth while, and it touched him, in spite of his conviction that her fate was inevitable.

'Poor child!' he said, 'it is a pity that she must follow her husband!'

'She ought to be in the Luxembourg instead of her husband. But for her he would not be there,' said Robespierre, taking the rose from its glass, and smelling it delicately. 'That retrograde movement, that weak compassion for the guilty, after going the lengths he had not hesitated to do, had a woman at the bottom of it. Roland's wife was the soul of the Gironde, and this Lucile inspired Camille and his party. No woman is worth anything in a sustained movement. They go too far at first; they are invaluable, as Mirabeau perceived, at the beginning of a revolution, but they stop short; they never can carry a thing to its logical end. They ruin a cause just when it is succeeding.'

‘You must either free Camille or arrest Lucile. She is very young, very beautiful, she will appeal to the people during the trial, and mischief will come of it.’

‘You are right; alas! my rose is overblown,’ said Robespierre, replacing the flower in its vase, whence its petals fell in a crimson shower on the list where he had just marked Lucile’s name. ‘You notice no discontent among the people?’ he added, with a shade of uneasiness.

‘Discontent? As I came here I heard one man say to another, “I am on the sunny side of the wall now; you shall hear of me some day,” and the other answered, “Thanks to the Revolution. Where would you or I be if the old barriers of caste still existed?”’

A singular expression of mingled and contradictory feelings passed over the face of Robespierre.

“Thanks to the Revolution,” they did not name me, then?’

‘Bon! he has destroyed all that overshadowed his fame; will he annihilate the Revolution now?’ thought De Pelven, with secret amusement, answering aloud, ‘When men speak of the Revolution, the virtuous Robespierre is in every man’s mind.’

‘Is it so?—Danton has declared that his name will have a place in the Pantheon of History, and I too have tried to serve mankind. But Fouché has seemed disquieted of late; there have been fewer denunciations, though we have raised the reward.’

‘Possibly not many remain to denounce.’

‘Not many, citizen Pelven! A thousand heads might yet fall, and we should not have freed the country from this fruitful monster of aristocracy, a cursed seed which lies so thickly in the ground that but for incessant watchfulness a fresh crop would spring up, as numerous, as dangerous as ever! It is this endless necessity for destroying it which prevents my being able to give my energies to my true work of purifying the morals and habits of the community. See here, read this measure which I propose to have passed on the first occasion, obliging everyone to state the amount of his fortune, how he gained it, his age, his profession, and what he contributes to patriotic objects.’

‘Dear friend,’ said De Pelven, in his cool and sarcastic tone, ‘believe me, it is far safer to arrest a dozen Dantons than to introduce such measures as these.’

‘All that has been hitherto done was but to clear the

ground. A few months hence the world will stand amazed at the sight of a Republic such as Rome and Greece never saw!’ said Robespierre, and his eyes glowed and kindled, his meagre figure seemed to dilate as he spoke.

‘The world does so already, I imagine,’ said De Pelven, with scarcely disguised irony, yet struggling in vain against the ascendancy which Robespierre always exercised over him when they were together. ‘But I dare not occupy more of your time—which belongs to the people, to mankind. Stay, surely I had something to say—I have it; I want a warrant of release for a person now in the Luxembourg, arrested by mistake, a cousin of mine.’

‘A woman?’

‘Yes—a middle-aged woman,’ added De Pelven, seeing Robespierre’s suspicious frown. ‘I need her at liberty; her arrest disconcerts my plans.’

‘It is not then from any weak pity that you desire her release?’

‘Not in the least. She may be guillotined immediately for aught I care when she has enabled me to discover two people of whom I have lost sight.’

‘You—a member of the Comité de Sûreté Générale, with all its means of investigation at your command, with agents all over Paris, yes, for anything I know, in the very house of Cathérine Théos herself’—Robespierre paused, and looked at him with his singular, covert glance, and De Pelven winced, feeling himself shrink before that scrutiny into a mere, small, commonplace plotter. ‘You pretend to need this woman’s release in order to find these people!’

‘This Valentine St. Aignan serves me as one of those agents,’ said De Pelven, adding inwardly, ‘Tiger-cat! *va!* I will make you drop a prey for once.’

‘Ha!—the woman for whom I signed a protection? And who are the people whom you want to find?’

‘Her nephew, *émigré*, lately returned to Paris, possibly here still, and a girl, who doubtless knows his movements. If the aunt were free, they would communicate with her.’

‘Is then the law not observed ordering all householders to put outside their doors an exact account of every inmate, age, name, birthplace, and profession?’

‘Observed, yes, though no law ever was framed that could not be evaded, but on the whole this is obeyed, and a curious

study the manner in which it is followed out. The rich and the well-born write all this minutely, on the smallest sheet of paper they can, and post it up as high as they dare. Some again fasten the placard by a nail, or a wafer, so that the wind blows it about, and makes it difficult to read.'

'That shall be looked to. Well?'

'Another set, the purest aristocrats or the timid, write it large, and add "Vive la République!" It is easy to read the character of a householder by observing these bills.'

'There is no one like you for such details,' said Robespierre, with genuine admiration, for such minutiae as these had an especial attraction for him. 'You are really invaluable, citizen Pelven. Here is your warrant, but recollect that this woman is under surveillance; use her, but remember she belongs to the Republic, and every drop of blood shed by an aristocrat aids to purge its old pollution. What do you want, Cornélia?'

His betrothed advanced reluctantly and timidly into the room. 'I am grieved to interrupt you, Maximilien, but several deputies from the Departments wait to see you,' she said, leaning affectionately on his chair. 'They crowd to visit the "incorruptible Robespierre."'

'It is well. Come again, my friend, when you have news for me. Let these men enter at once, my Cornélia.'

De Pelven always breathed freer when he left Robespierre's presence. For him, as for all who came within his immediate influence, this man had a deadly fascination, an inexplicable attraction such as a serpent is said to possess. 'If I stayed long with him he would mould me like wax,' De Pelven muttered, angrily. 'I know not if it be his genius, or some spell such as I have smiled at in old tales, or that he is in such terrible earnest, while I——. And yet he must fall, fall soon, all tends that way.' De Pelven stopped as he went down the stairs, and looked out at the carpenter's yard, and the great saw moving suggestively up and down at one end. 'Fall! But what a fall it will be! How he transcends all others!' and he mentally enumerated the other leaders of the Revolution, only to see them dwarfed by the one whom he had just quitted. The deputies were coming up, in all the coarseness of ultra-Republican costume; he glanced at them, and laughed inwardly as he wondered what they would think of the marked politeness and dainty neat-

ness of their idol, as he saw them cast displeased and astonished looks at himself and each other, evidently taking him for some aristocrat, come to besiege Robespierre with a petition. A puppet-show, representing a little guillotine in operation on a set of puppets, was performed at the door to an admiring audience of all the *gamins* of the quarter, who were accompanying the spectacle with the popular air of 'Dansons la guillotine,' sung with great vigour and unanimity.

De Pelven shrugged his shoulders as he went by.

'Yes, yes,' he said to himself, 'we are in full reign of terror, but some day it must end, must, and will be succeeded by a second, only that will be the *Terreur Blanche*,' and he went on his way reflecting as he often now did, on what his course must be if the Royalists gained the upper hand again.

'And that would not be long delayed,' he continued, 'if there were a single man among them capable of being a soldier or a despot. But who is there? The Orléans princes? Too young. The King's brothers? Bah, they are good at nothing but handling a knife and fork. Who then is there? And a despot we must have, that is clear. The French have been used to be ridden, and bridled and spurred so long that in the end they will find it their only régime, and hail the first despot with genius enough to deal with them as a driver, only he must know how to use and flatter our national weaknesses, and have no impossible theories of ideal perfection, like our Maximilien yonder. The only question is who the man will be.'

For even the far-sighted De Pelven could not predict that the despot whom he saw to be a necessary link in the chain of events was that young Corsican general who just then was in imminent danger of losing his head, thanks to the enmity of his fellow-countryman, Salicetti.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNCAGED.

CLOSE confinement in the crowded prison, and scanty fare, were beginning to tell on the health of Mademoiselle de St.

Aignan, if not on her spirits, though it was surprising to herself how soon she grew accustomed to the knowledge that at any moment she might be summoned to cease the conversation in which she was engaged, or lay down the hand at whist which she was taking, and stand the mock trial ending almost certainly with a sentence of death, as every hour some of her companions were called to do. She so entirely expected this result that she had cut her hair short, to prevent the executioner from doing so on the scaffold, and it was with such incredulous astonishment that she heard the news of her release, when a turnkey summoned her, that she exclaimed, 'There must be some mistake!' De Pelven was in the court-yard below, with a carriage, and no time was allowed for farewells to her fellow-prisoners, as much astonished as herself, for he wished as little to be said or known of such an unwonted act of clemency as possible, aware that Robespierre honestly reproached himself for weakness in sparing an aristocrat, and secretly feared the result to his popularity if the tale got abroad.

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had imagined that Balmat must in some incomprehensible way have compassed her deliverance, for though too much in dread of *mouchards*, who might overhear and report what passed, to say much, he had contrived to convey his opinion of De Pelven to her, and exact a promise that she would observe absolute secrecy as to Edmée's movements, for it was easy to foresee that De Pelven would try to learn them through her, though Balmat had not dreamed of the more subtle move of setting her free, nor guessed that this De Pelven, who seldom spoke in the Convention, and took no leading part in the Comité de Sécurité Générale, had the power to demand her release and obtain it. At the discovery of who her liberator was, a great revulsion took place in her feelings, and she could only hold his hand, and utter some hurried words of gratitude as he placed her in the *fiacre*.

'You look ill, dear mademoiselle,' he said gently, observing her pallor and altered countenance. 'You have been suffering, I fear.'

'Of an illness which I fully believed would terminate fatally, my cousin! It is the usual end of it in the Luxembourg. I can hardly yet believe myself free! If you knew how many in this fortnight I have seen go forth to die!

Young and old, men and women ; more than once three generations together, or a whole family, happier, it seemed, than those of whom one was taken and the other left ! And yet,' she added, with a sudden rebound into her natural gaiety, 'I would not have you think it was all tears and lamentations yonder. I assure you we, who were not *au secret*, had charming little whist parties, delightful conversation. All the best society of Paris is there ; indeed, it is only in the prisons that good society and real conversation is now to be found ! Elsewhere people monologue or declaim, or discuss politics with low-bred vehemence ; there we spoke of literature, and art, and news without undue excitement ; it was delightful to meet once more with good manners, and the old courtesy and gaiety of people *comme il faut*.'

'Alas, my cousin, I fear you will regret quitting your captivity !'

'No, not quite that, De Pelven ; there were certainly drawbacks, I admit that, I can afford to admit it now. There—*que voulez vous !* had one begun to grumble one would have done nothing else.' And for a short time she was silent, resuming with, 'Do you know I comprehend, as I never did when I used to read Rousseau and the Encyclopédists and dabble in ideal reforms, how all this anarchy has come about ? Sometimes I really think we deserve all we have got, though it is an awful retribution, and falls on many innocent people. Ah, the sins of the forefathers truly they *are* visited, and the day of reckoning has come in our time.'

'You are a greater philosopher than I knew, my cousin,' said De Pelven, all the while considering how best to surprise what she knew of Edmée.

'I will tell you who my teacher has been—a poor Rochellois, a Protestant printer. Of course he did not belong to any of our sets,—there is a most democratic mixture in the Luxembourg, but they fall naturally into separate groups, and never mingle. People of his own rank he held aloof from ; he seemed to have done with the world. I noticed the man's face ; he had a strangely still and heart-broken look ; did not speak two words from morning till night, and read a little old black book which he had managed to smuggle in with him ; I thought it a "Livre d'Heures," but it turned out to be a Bible. He interested me.'

‘No one has been more checkmated by the course of the Revolution than the Protestants,’ said De Pelven, with a smile, while he bided his time to introduce the subject of Edmée. ‘The poor wretches expected liberty, equality, and all the rest of the catechism; the democrats held out their arms to them, believing them prepared to go all lengths, made one, a certain Rabaut, take a leading part in the Assembly, but they shipwrecked themselves, as they have always done, by their obstinate convictions, and one fine day they found all their “temples” shut, and themselves persecuted like the rest.’

‘Yes, they have convictions,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, too much occupied with her subject to notice the sneer. ‘It was strange to meet such liberty of thought with such deep faith. This man was not grieving for himself, but for France. “I had dreamed of a republic such as the world never saw,” he said to me, “and it has ended in this!”’

‘The first part of his remark is precisely what Robespierre said to me yesterday,’ observed De Pelven; ‘a little while hence he will conclude as your printer did.’

‘Do not name that monster in the same breath with my poor friend! It all sounds very little interesting to you, but to me it was a revelation. Good heavens! how those Huguenots have suffered, and we hardly realised their existence! Betrayed, tortured, murdered, all in the name of God and the Church, by Christian men,—their pastors hanged, their gentry beheaded, their children forced into convents, the galleys awaiting all who tried to escape—and this conducted, urged on by priests! We are in the midst of a reign of terror now, but they have known one lasting longer, and more base in its injustice than even this! And when the States met in ’89, what did the clergy urge?’

‘I know what they did *not* urge; they suggested no reforms among themselves, and did not at all desire to sacrifice any of their revenues to lessen the national debt.’

‘Not they! All they could find to suggest was a fresh edict against the Protestants!’

‘Dear cousin, your sojourn in the Luxembourg has made a heretic of you!’

‘No, no, I never pretended to be a fervent Catholic, but I am no heretic though I have learned a few things lately.

At all events you grant that forcing the Huguenots to emigrate was a fatal blunder? We have lost in them an educated middle class, who would have balanced these visionary fanatics.'

'Yes, it would have been for their interest.'

'Very well! there is no sin in having interest and duty sometimes on the same side. And it seems that they educate—these Protestants! they educate, while our clergy hold ignorance the only safe state for the masses. They all think what young Chateaubriand—you recollect him?—the son of the Marquis of Combourg—once said to me, "The press will destroy the old world," but unlike him, boy as he was, they have not the sense to see that the press is indestructible. Ah, by-the-by, I met in the Luxembourg a relation of his, Madame de Belveser, of whom you know the conversation was so witty that her confessor declared every sin she told him of was an epigram. I do not know when I have met so many old acquaintances. But now we are *tête-à-tête* in a *fiacre*, where no one can overhear, tell me how public matters stand.'

'You were not perhaps aware that you had Danton as a fellow-prisoner.'

'Danton! Then his was the voice of thunder which we heard in another part of the palace. Is it possible? Robespierre then stands pre-eminent and alone? What will he do?'

De Pelven only shrugged his shoulders.

Why, we have nearly run through all possible changes—Royalism, Reform, the Gironde, the Montagne; what remains?'

'The worship of the strongest.'

'Then let us bow to Death, cousin, for only his power remains unshaken.'

'These are gloomy thoughts, dear mademoiselle, and I fear that I have news that will not cheer you. That poor Edmée, the day after your arrest she disappeared.'

'Ah, to be sure. How am I to let her know? But it matters little; she will certainly learn in a day or two, and return to me. These days make one strangely suspicious and ungrateful,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with a mixture of remorse and of vexation against Balmat for having misled her with regard to De Pelven.

'You know then where she is?'

'Yes—no—that is, she is perfectly safe, but he never happened to say where he lives, and it did not occur to me to ask. One has to be so cautious since the charge of conspiring in prison has been devised.'

'She is then with the Chevalier?' asked Pe Pelven, on whose ear the masculine pronoun which had escaped Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had fallen with startling effect.

'My nephew? *Mais non!* he is not in Paris, as far as I know. Surely you have no reason to think so?'

'On the contrary, but with whom then?'

'Ah, that I must not say, until I gain permission. But you will not have long to wait, I imagine. If I could have foreseen that you would deliver me, I should of course have never given a promise of silence. She is with friends—very safe friends, but not very wise, it would seem. He certainly has once been strangely mistaken,' she added, laying her hand on De Pelven's, with a remorseful gratitude which he did not at all understand.

'My dear cousin,' he answered, again stung by that unwelcome pronoun, 'I had no idea that you had any friends in Paris but myself.'

'It was a surprise to me, dear De Pelven, I assure you.'

'Allow me to question whether you indeed have any able efficiently to protect you unless it is I, but to do so I must know all. Recollect how slippery the ground we walk on is!'

'I know it—I know it. This promise is unfortunate. But tell me, did you how did you so greatly alarm the child?'

De Pelven perfectly understood what she meant, and that she could not bring herself to put it into plain words.

'She misunderstood me. You know I cannot admit that the tie you spoke of is more than a legal fiction; it is universally held so; see the number of divorces which take place every day! Despairing as I did at that moment for you, doubting whether even I could protect her, feeling too the position of a girl alone in Paris was full of danger, I confess to having urged her to accept my friend.'

'Ah, I understand, and the foolish child imagined. I see it all!' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, bursting into a hearty fit of laughter; 'I will set this straight. But no more of your friend, my cousin. I explained my sentiments on

that point before, though perhaps the situation justified you. If Alain could but have taken her when he was in Paris ! and yet I do not know what I should do without her. One grows extraordinarily fond of her ; she will never be only a little loved. To you I daresay she seems only a little *provinciale* ; you are a man of the world, used to beautiful and witty women, but I assure you in some eyes she will be absolutely lovely, have a fascination really dangerous ! It is just one of those things which some will feel to their hearts' core, while others stand wondering what they see to bewitch them.'

'You are no doubt right, my cousin. See, we are arrived.'

'Ah, already ! I wish she were here to welcome me ! The poor child, she does not know that I am free ; she is no doubt grieving for me, trembling to look in the "Moniteur" lest my name should appear in the death-list.'

'As a rule, no one is ever doing what we imagine, dear mademoiselle,' said De Pelven, as he helped her to alight. 'The chances therefore are that Mademoiselle Edmée and her companion are very well amused, and dining together at some café.'

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan did not hear. She was looking round with a sort of curiosity, and nodding with good-humoured triumph to Madame Lafarge, who stood at her kitchen-door, with eyes like black river-pools, watching her pass.

'There is one who hoped never to see me again,' remarked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as they toiled up the long flights of stairs. 'What a coarse, handsome virago it is ! Cousin, you cannot imagine how singular the sensation is of returning here, and seeing all again which I thought I had quitted for ever. It is incredibly difficult either to believe that I am here, or that this morning I fully expected to go to the guillotine.'

And she passed her hand over her hair. 'I have been so long without necessities that I shall feel the return to my possessions luxury. But what is this seal on the cupboard and boxes ? One would say it was made with a button.'

'Very probably ; the seal of the nation is apt to be made now-a-days with a sou, or whatever comes first to hand. At first it was a much more formal affair. This house is in the section Mutius Scævola ; I will look to all this. Where is that imbecile, old Lafarge ? he keeps out of the way as if all

were not right. Is it safe? the wine I sent you—is it here?’

‘How, cousin! you cannot mean that the virtuous Revolutionary Committee help themselves to the effects of the poor citizen whom they are forced to arrest? *fi donc!* what vile and unpatriotic suspicions!’ laughed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. ‘All seems safe, and we may venture to break the national seal? I think I can reproduce it if necessary.’

If it had not been for the mysterious ‘he’ who so unexpectedly appeared on the scene, De Pelven would have felt that he was again master of the situation. Even as it was, he knew that in the return of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan he had recovered the clue to Edmée’s movements, but he taxed his brain in vain to discover who could have told her of Alain’s presence in Paris, or how she could have had news of Edmée. If the jailers of the Luxembourg were to be trusted on these points, he ought to have had information. That no one but himself had ever visited his *protégées* in Madame Lafarge’s house he felt certain. That Edmée’s flight was unpremeditated he could not doubt, and it was evident that only some hasty promise induced Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to keep him in the dark. Her unsuspectingness was almost the most perplexing part of the affair. De Pelven was well used to hold the threads of many complicated matters in his hands, and give each full and minute attention, but now his head was far from cool, his judgment was troubled; he had never before been influenced by a strong personal interest. He began to feel with great irritation that he could not trust himself or free his mind from this matter, and even as he sat in the Palais de Justice, listening to the trial of Danton and Camille Desmoulins, the question of who Edmée’s unknown protector could be would dart uncalled into his mind, and make his pulses beat faster far than the thunders of Danton’s voice, or even those parting words of his which many present felt to be prophetic, ‘I drag Robespierre after me in my fall!’

CHAPTER XX.

BALMAT'S CONSPIRACY.

IF no man can be justly called poor but he who lacks common-sense, then Balmat had no right to be so counted, though he had a hard fight to provide his daily bread. He was cautious and slow, but he possessed a calm and dispassionate judgment, which enabled him to encounter even such an adversary as De Pelven, especially when working in what was light to him, while to his opponent it was at the best a distracting twilight. On going to the Luxembourg, a few days after the release of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, he was encountered by the little son of the head turnkey, who was fond of him, and always ran to demand a sketch of some object which his childish fancy suggested, whenever Balmat came. The young Swiss, partly because he was really fond of children, and partly from policy, used readily to gratify the child, and was sitting in the turnkey's own room on the *rez de chaussée*, when the father came in, holding his heavy bunch of keys. 'No more visits to the *détenus* for you, citizen Balmat,' said he, patting his little son's head; 'ah ha, Marius, make the most of this chance, my son.'

'How so, citizen Gracchus?' asked Balmat, his heart beating faster with the fear that his having been a medium of communication between the prisoners and the outer world had been discovered.

'We have orders to redouble our vigilance, to exclude all newspapers, and let no one in, unless indeed as a prisoner, and you have no great desire to enter on those terms, I imagine? We have had two ex-marquises, a count, a couple of abbés, and a pair of fine ladies, all brought here this morning in one *fiacre*! One of the ladies complained of a *migraine*; we told her we had a sure cure for headache here,' said the turnkey, with a laugh, and an expressive movement of the hand across his throat. 'You would have thought she was going to faint! There will be hot work now Camille and Danton are disposed of. Do you miss no one here? Benoit has been arrested.'

'Benoit!' exclaimed Balmat, dropping his crayon.

Benoît was the concierge of the Luxembourg, an old man who had from the first shown as much mildness and compassion to the prisoners as he dared, and formed a strong contrast to most officials in the prisons.

‘On what charge?’ added Balmat, taking the crayon from the impatient Marius, to whom the Garde Nationale whom the Swiss was sketching seemed much more important than Benoît’s history.

‘For hiding some money at the request of a *détenu*; it was not the fact, for he had sent word to the Public Accuser that he had this sum, belonging to such a one, newly guillotined, in charge. But Lenain, he who denounced him, you understand, hoped to get released by making up this charge; however, all that came of it is that Lenain stays in prison, and Benoît is arrested, and the seals put on all his possessions.’

‘Who is to replace him?’ asked Balmat, after a short silence. Both the men knew each other’s feelings perfectly, but so general was the mistrust engendered by the times that neither would admit them to the other.

‘Well—they say Couthon means to send us Guiard,’ answered the turnkey, unable to refrain from making a grimace, as he named the infamous concierge of a prison at Lyons.

Balmat began another drawing for little Marius, and said, ‘There is one portrait I should have liked to add to my collection; it is a handsome head, and would have pleased the citizen Lebon; that woman in the *entresol* which used to be a hayloft.’

‘As for that you are too late for the market.’

‘How too late?’ asked Balmat, hastily.

‘No, not that way,’ answered the turnkey, with a laugh, and the same gesture which he had used before to complete his meaning. ‘She must have powerful friends, that *ci-devant*. A fellow who looked a true *ci-devant* himself, if ever I saw one—and I have seen a good many, you must allow, in these last two years, came here one morning lately, with a warrant of release in due form in his hand, and though we all had a look at it we could find nothing amiss, and she had to be set free. Strange, is it not? She is in luck, the *brigande*, for we are going to have sharp work, very sharp, they say; the virtuous Robespierre keeps us at it.’

The next three months were fully to bear out what

citizen Gracchus predicted. Balmat gave the sketch of a mounted soldier which he had just completed to the little lad, and stroked his black curls.

'So then, I must say good-bye to you, my boy, I am sorry; no one likes my pictures so well as you!'

'My father shall shut you up with the others, and then you can draw for me all day long,' suggested the child.

'What do you say to that plan, citizen?' laughed the turnkey. 'Listen, my son, thou must keep all these drawings, and some day thy good friend will be a great painter, and then thou wilt say, "These the famous Balmat did for me when I was a boy;" dost thou hear?'

He spoke in jest, but without intention of mocking Balmat, on whose face, however, there came a cloud of pain. 'Farewell, my little Marius; farewell, citizen Gracchus,' he said, gathering his crayons up.

'Good morning, friend; I thank you for your kindness to the lad. He has fine times of it; the women prisoners all pet and spoil him when I let him run among them; you see many of them are mothers, and mothers are the same all the world over, it seems, even if they are aristocrats.'

Balmat tied up his portfolio, and walked out of the Luxembourg, while the hoarse voice of a newsvendor shouted under the walls, 'List of sixty or eighty winners in the lottery of the holy guillotine!' No wistful faces crowded to the windows to-day; the prisoners had been shut up in their rooms, and forbidden to look out under pain of losing the few privileges allowed them. Balmat could but be relieved that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was out of such evil days as were evidently at hand, but her release was unquestionably due to De Pelven, and Balmat was asking himself what the motive could have been. Too few knew De Pelven intimately for Balmat to have succeeded in learning much about him, but among David's pupils were many violent young Republicans, and one, a close friend of Camille Desmoulins, and just now consequently in no small danger, had heard and seen enough of De Pelven to show Balmat that he had to deal with a dark and subtle schemer, scarcely to be influenced by tenderness or remorse. If, therefore, he had obtained the freedom of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, it was with some ulterior motive, probably regarding Edmée. To see Mademoiselle de St. Aignan undiscovered and quickly

and urge silence and secrecy on her was Balmat's first thought ; but his plan developed as he reflected ; and after he had taken counsel with Edmée, and a madcap friend of his, another fellow-pupil in David's atelier, of opposite opinions to almost all the rest, who even in these times scarcely concealed his ultra-Royalist opinions, later became a ' muscadin à cadenettes,' and for the pleasure of a prank, especially if spiced by the chance of outwitting a Jacobin, would any day have been charmed to risk his head.

That Edmée should return to the Lafarge house was out of the question ; that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan should hold herself indefinitely bound to secrecy was not to be hoped. Balmat felt hurried along much faster than he liked ; if anything were to be done it must be attempted at once, and if possible Mademoiselle de St. Aignan must be transferred to the Maison Crocq ; but this plan appeared so beset with difficulties that neither the slow, Swiss mind of Balmat, nor the readier one of Edmée, spurred though it was by longing to see Mademoiselle de St. Aignan again, and by the fear of falling afresh into De Pelven's power, could devise any hopeful scheme. Balmat and Edmée had become very like brother and sister in these perilous days, she clinging to him as her only stay and counsellor, and he full of kindly pity and liking for the girl thus thrown on his hands. They called their landlady into council, but though generously ready to take her share of danger, she could suggest nothing.

'Do what you will, my children,' said she, looking at them benevolently, 'I am a Republican, as you know, but as long as I live I will do my best to save the unfortunate, no matter what colours they wear, white or tri-colour, it is all one to Madelon Crocq. Only do not fail, that would be unpardonable,' and therewith she left them, and they heard her vehemently scolding her husband below, a thing so unusual, though he constantly deserved it, that it turned their thoughts for a moment from their own concerns, but they soon began again to discuss what was to be done.

'We must not fail ; Madelon is quite right ; it would cost all our heads,' Balmat said.

'Ah, how much you are risking for strangers !' said Edmée.

'Ah, bah !' was all Balmat's reply, 'what are we in the world for but to help one another ? I will go and talk to my friend Isnard ; he has ideas, he will suggest something, and perhaps the more audacious the better.'

Edmée stood alone for awhile at the window of the room which she rented in this house. She had had no heart to make it comfortable, and as yet realised too little the hope of seeing Mademoiselle de St. Aignan in it to trouble herself about its discomfort. All her youth had passed under the influence of fear, and no later experiences would efface the effects of those early impressions. As she stood thinking thoughts which soon became prayers, she dared not ask that Balmat might succeed; she only murmured a petition that they might be enabled to bear all the pains which God might be pleased that day to send them. There were not many sounds now in the house to distract her thoughts. On the same floor lived a husband and wife with several children, who seemed very poor; the man had been a painter of armorial bearings, and was of course thrown out of employment very early in the Revolution; the wife had worked in a lace-factory, but no less than twelve were now closed, for a fatal blow had been struck at the lace-workers all unconsciously even before Republican austerity of costume became first fashionable and then prudential, when Marie Antoinette introduced simplicity and Indian muslin instead of point. Edmée knew by experience that some people wore lace still, for she had earned a little money by selling and mending it, but, as a trade, lace-making was dead. She wondered sometimes how these people contrived to live, but saw nothing of them, unless they chanced to meet on the stairs, though she had often watched the children playing among the grass in the cemetery, on which her window looked out. They were there now. The pale-faced eldest girl was amusing two little ones; Edmée saw her pick a dandelion-head, and make the youngest blow away the fluffy seeds. 'Count how many years it will be before thou art married, Mariette,' Edmée could hear her say, and then the little sister blew like an infant *Æolus*, and all the light seeds floated abroad over the broken tombs. 'But I shall not marry at all then!' the younger said, with a face of the deepest disappointment. Edmée's attention was called away from them by the entrance of Madelon Crocq, whose homely face looked hot and indignant, and her Auvergnate head-dress was all awry. She gave it a vigorous pull into its place, by way of working off her excitement.

'Excuse me, citoyenne,' said she, 'that I went away in a hurry, without hearing what that good Balmat counted on

doing. Ah, you do not yet know? Good; he is wise, that young man, he reflects; there are not many like him. What a pity he is a Protestant, but what would one have!—every-one has some fault. You do not ask why I went away so suddenly?’

‘I thought that Georges had come in and wanted his dinner.’

‘Georges—no—.’ Georges was Madelon’s nephew, a broad shouldered fellow, with a beard and long hair, who was a favourite model in David’s atelier, for a Hercules, a Jupiter, or a gladiator, as the case might be, and who otherwise gained his living as porter on the quais. ‘He knows how to take care of himself.—I blush to tell you. I heard my husband down below, and wanted to speak to him; what do I see! he wears his working dress, he has his tools out, as if it were not the blessed Sunday. I exclaim; he replies that there is no Sunday now, the Convention have decreed this long while that we shall only observe Decadi, a feast of man’s making. I reply, “Good, I am no Royalist, as thou knowest; I have felt for myself how the nobles oppress the poor and eat our hearts, but I am a Christian, and as long as we live together thou wilt wear thy best coat on the Sunday, and do no work. Amuse thyself, if thou wilt, but work, no, and speak not to Madelon Crocq of thy Decadis!” So he had to put his cobbling away, and I paid no attention to his grumbling, but lit his pipe, and gave him half a bottle of wine. I let him wear a hideous red and blue cravat, as you know, and he is welcome to grow the biggest pair of whiskers he can, but work on Sunday, no!’

‘He will not object to my aunt’s coming here, dear Madelon?’ asked Edmée, aware that when Crocq came home from the café, having drunk much more than was good for him, he would declare that his wife wanted to have him guillotined, and must get rid of her lodger on the second floor.

‘Object it may be, but after all it is my house; I bought it with my own savings, for as for him he never had the gift of economy, and if I choose, she shall come. His objections are the least of my cares.’

‘You, a Republican, venture so much for strangers and Royalists!’

‘See then, my pretty one,’ said Madelon, knitting fast as she spoke, ‘all Republicans are not like the black monsters

who sit in the Convention, think not that. A Republican ! yes—if you had lived in my village, and seen how many died of hunger every year, yet dared not touch a head of the game which devoured our little fields, where we had sowed our savings and our hearts, see you, for one loves one's bit of ground like one's life,—how we dared not weed this crop lest we should disturb the young partridges, nor grow corn on that ground because there the convent cows had grazing-right—if you knew how all was taxed and tolled, at ferry and market, and at every turn—ah, and how no one cared for us, whether we lived or died, and what a bad seigneur could do, and did do, thou wouldest understand better why I am against the nobles. God never made one man expressly that he might trample on another !'

But He made rich and poor, and I do not see that anyone is better off now !'

'Wait, my little one, wait. Winter must come before spring ; are we to set right all that is come and gone wrong with gloved hands ? Ah, I have wept for the King, and though Marie Antoinette did us much harm, and would have brought foreign troops upon us, I wept for her too, but all are mad now ; we must have patience and wait.'

'They did not wish for change in my village, till it was put into their heads,' persisted Edmée.

'Perhaps they were too downtrodden to feel that they were trampled on ; I have seen that too,' said Madelon, with so stern a look that Edmée recoiled, startled, and turned away with a sort of aversion. Each was speaking from personal feeling ; they could not sympathise, but the woman, who yet had suffered tenfold more than Edmée, was more ready to make allowances than the girl, whom she fully believed a born aristocrat. 'Poor little thing !' she continued, with rough tenderness ; 'how should you feel what I do, you who are under foot now, and know nothing of what we have been bearing time out of mind ; but we are not all Héberts and Marats, *va !* Thou knowest I bear no malice to the aristocrats, though my uncle was hung for being a *contrebandier en saulnage*, and my father was ruined because he tried to have justice on an employé of the Government, who took his horse by force. What was the consequence ? the answer came down from Paris, as we chanced to learn, "The employé was wrong, but quash the suit ; it will not do to allow that a Government official can be called to account."

But to Edmée the wrongs of those with whom she had cast in her lot were too keenly present to allow for the feelings of those who had the oppression of centuries to revenge. She was spared the necessity of an answer by the entrance of Balmat, whom neither at first knew, so changed was he by the costume of a Garde Nationale which he had assumed. He was a little embarrassed by their laughter and exclamations, and explained his plan very briefly; it had been suggested by his friend, who had immediately proposed to carry off Mademoiselle de St. Aignan by a feigned arrest, and urgently desired to do so himself. This Balmat would not allow, but he thought the plan good, borrowed the uniform from an acquaintance who did not trouble himself to ask why it was required, and came back to tell Edmée that he was about to go to the Maison Lafarge at once, since from what she had told him it was an unlikely hour for De Pelven to be there. Isnard, he added, was resolved to have a hand in it, and had somewhere found an obliging coachman, who had lent him a *fiacre*, which he insisted on driving to fetch Mademoiselle de St. Aignan in. They were grave enough when they understood that the attempt was to be made at once. Its failure would be fatal to all concerned, but Edmée could only sit and endure the suspense as best she might.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS.

BALMAT found his friend Isnard on the box of a tumble-down old *fiacre*, disguised to perfection as a coachman. His talent for acting, and his powers of looking like anyone but himself, had more than once saved his life in these dangerous days; he had not only deceived those sent to arrest him into believing that the man before them was not he whom they sought, but had assumed the character now of one, now of another well-known patriot with such success that his sayings and doings had been quoted as theirs by no means always to their satisfaction. When he appeared in his natural character his mobile, plastic features were of a delicate and

rather distinguished type, not uncommon in Western France. Balmat thought him a hare-brained, light-hearted scapegrace. He had not fathomed Isnard, nor indeed was it in his nature to understand the capacities for revenge, the deadly vindictiveness lying deep under the surface. 'Make haste then !' he heard him say in a quick, low voice, when Balmat came out of the Maison Crocq ; ' we shall have hard work to get back ; the Faubourg St. Antoine is moving ! '

Balmat jumped into the *fiacre*, and as they drove along he saw signs which showed that Isnard was right ; an unusual stir prevailed ; heads clustered at the windows, groups stood at every street-corner, looking up and down ; women came to their doors, and answered to Isnard's call of enquiry to know what was on foot, that they were ' waiting to see the insurrection pass,' and all along the Rue St. Honoré and the Palais Royal the shopkeepers were hastily closing their shutters, and barricading their doors ; every salon and café was shut, while under the lime-trees in the garden cannon were ranged, and a great number of armed men stood consulting. Isnard looked back through the open window behind him as he drove on fast, and said, ' There will be fine plundering there for the faubourg ! ' and Balmat, a watchmaker's son, could not but mentally calculate how much ruin would shortly be wrought among the clocks, watches, ornaments, and jewels which filled the gay shops of the Palais Royal, known since the Revolution took possession of it as Palais Egalité, if the Faubourg St. Antoine indeed poured out its fierce and starving myriads to attack them.

Already the tramp of innumerable feet, the deep hum of approaching voices, sometimes rising into a hoarse roar, the dull and heavy vibration of cannon dragged along the boulevards and quais, and occasional bursts of the ' Marseillaise,' sung by a thousand voices, were heard in the distance. The Palais Royal, unable to divine the cause of this onslaught, only by chance learning its danger, closed its barricades with the speed of terror, and prepared for battle. Paris was all at once, without any warning whatever, on the brink of a civil war, which, once kindled, must spread from street to street and house to house, until literally quenched in blood ; and so sudden, so unexpected was the situation that no one had even informed the Convention, sitting in debate on national affairs in a hall of the Tuileries, unconscious of what was happening

close by. At another time Balmat would have got out of the way as fast as possible, and Isnard have plunged into the thickest of the combat, but both were now fully occupied with the enterprise on hand, and chiefly desired to get back to the Maison Crocq while it was possible. They drove unmolested past the threatened quarter, for the streets here were perfectly empty, the besiegers not yet arrived, the besieged behind their entrenchments. There was something very strange and ominous in this pause and hush, while the air was full of an electric thrill of coming danger, and distant sounds told of the gathering storm. To return through those streets half-an-hour later would be a difficult thing indeed.

‘Hark ! They have a mind to spare the national razor a little work,’ said Isnard, turning his head again to speak to Balmat, ‘all the city will be in a blaze before we get back. But what can have put the match !’ and as Balmat made no answer, quite unable to divine how the patriotic Palais Royal, with its Girondist Café de Chartres and its Dantonist Café de Foy, could have offended, he added, ‘We shall never be able to drive back. If we get her I shall go as near to the Passage de l’Orme as I can ; then you must take her on foot. I will look after the *fiacre*.’

‘If I can do nothing else I will take her to the cloister of the Augustins,’ said Balmat, who, for want of a better place, had made himself a rude studio in the cloister of the desecrated church, and his friend nodded and urged on his horse. The excitement had not yet reached the by-street where was the Maison Lafarge, though already the whole population of the Faubourg St. Antoine was pouring down the Rue des Droits de l’Homme and the adjacent streets, armed with bayonets and sabres, pikes, clubs, hatchets, and guns ; old and young pressing on together, uniforms mingled with ragged carmagnoles, women carrying their infants, or dragging along older children clinging to their skirts, a gaunt, fierce, hollow-eyed, and terrible throng, pouring out of cellars and garrets, and workshops, ready for fire and massacre, yet moving on with that instinct of order which characterised all these popular outbreaks, and betrayed that they were guided by unseen, powerful hands. From every street recruits rushed to swell the advancing columns, and were welcomed with a thunder of acclamations and a new raising of the ‘Marseillaise.’ The besieged in the Palais Royal saw the first of the

insurgent bands appear, headed by its banners, at the same moment that Balmat was knocking at the Lafarge house door, which old Lafarge timidly opened, and followed him as he mounted the stairs as rapidly as he could, glad that Théroigne had not admitted him. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was sitting alone, missing Edmée exceedingly, and very near regretting in earnest that gay and brilliant company in the Luxembourg which had transported thither the lively wit and the reckless immorality of the many, together with the deep piety and resignation of the few. She did not at first recognise Balmat, and he had time to make her a sign which she understood, while saying in an official tone, 'Here is a mandate of arrest; you will follow me at once.'

'Willingly,' she answered, rising up with a smile, and seeing that all enquiries must wait. 'May I take any of my property?'

'What you will, so long as you do it in five minutes. You, citizen, will be answerable for the rest,' Balmat added to Lafarge; and then as it occurred to him that the old man's attention might be happily employed by something to his own advantage—'there seems to be wine and food in that cupboard; you are at liberty to make use of it.'

'Ah, the Republic is a good mother!' answered Lafarge, delighted, and he tottered to the cupboard to count the wine bottles, while Mademoiselle de St. Aignan made up a bundle in such haste that she afterwards found more muslin kerchiefs and lace caps in it than anything else, while Balmat, seeing Edmée's lace-cushion and paint-box, quietly took possession of them. 'Now your papers; they will be required,' he said and led the way downstairs, followed by his wondering captive, while old Lafarge sat down on the sofa, tenderly contemplating first the contents of the cupboard, whose doors he had left open, and then the arm-chair, from whose use he had been debarred since Mademoiselle de St. Aignan returned. 'She may, however, come back; she has once!' he said presently, his face of satisfaction falling. 'Perhaps I had better take it to my own room if she should return I can say it was wanted for the service of the nation;' and by-and-by he put the plan into execution, conveying the heavy arm-chair down the successive flights of stairs, like a feeble and aged ant, which has undertaken to drag home a burden far beyond its strength, but by dint of perseverance succeeds at last.

As Balmat and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan reached the passage leading to the street-door, Théroigne rushed out upon them from some distant room, for the first time aware of what was going on. Balmat felt her black eyes upon him, and grew very uncomfortable, though his stolid countenance told nothing of it, and he answered her hasty questions composedly enough.

‘You are no Frenchman!’ cried she, with angry suspicion, ‘you speak like a foreigner, you are a spy of Pitt and Cobourg, in league with this *scélérate* your accent betrays you!’

‘Everyone has not the advantage of being a born Parisian, like you, citoyenne,’ replied Balmat, taking hold of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and trying to get past; ‘move a little, I pray you; I am in haste.’

‘See, madame, there is some mistake, is it not so? I cannot surely be arrested again,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, hoping to disarm her suspicion by seeming reluctant to go. Théroigne only cast a fierce and contemptuous glance on her, and turned again on Balmat.

‘Show me your order, scoundrelly traitor!’ she cried, with a gesture and attitude which was wasted on the phlegmatic Swiss, who held out in silence a warrant correct enough to have deceived a more experienced eye than that of Théroigne, for Isnard had foreseen this possibility, and drawn it up in due form. Reading plainer handwriting than his would have been a difficulty to Théroigne, who studied it with anger and doubt increased by the effort of deciphering it. ‘I have seen one before, and that had some printing on it; this is all *pattes de mouche*!’ said she, barring the way.

‘Probably all the printed ones were used up,’ suggested Balmat, glad to see Isnard look in, with an impatient call. ‘’Tis not I who detain you; the citoyenne here refuses to let me pass.’

‘How then, my charmer! the thing is impossible,’ cried Isnard from the doorway. ‘Théroigne Lafarge oppose bringing an aristocrat to justice! What would the Comité Révolutionnaire say, I ask you? and how come you to be lingering here,’ he persisted, overpowering her loud and angry demand of how he knew her, ‘when the Faubourg St. Antoine has learned that those rascals of the Palais Egalité have mounted the white cockade and turned Royalists! What! not believe me? me, Regulus Favard, of the section Des Piques? Ask

all your neighbours then if it be not so. As soon as ever I have conducted this brigande of a *ci-devant* to Les Carmes I shall go and lend my arm to the patriots yonder.'

The shouts of people running down the street bore out his assertion; the news of the intended attack on the Palais Royal had spread far and wide. Théroigne stood uncertain, glaring at Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as if the instinct of hatred warned her that her prey was slipping out of her clutch. 'I will go too then,' said she, suddenly, 'and see this woman in Les Carmes with my own eyes.' And she seated herself in the *fiacre*, and awaited the others. There was no choice but to follow. A call from her would have brought a dozen people round, and destroyed all chance of escape. Balmat put Mademoiselle de St. Aignan in, without daring to answer her anxious and enquiring looks even by a glance, and jumped up beside Isnard, who drove back more slowly than he had come, for the streets were now full of hurrying crowds, and he was not sorry for the opportunity of exchanging a few words with Balmat. 'We must get into the thick of it, and shake her off somehow in the tumult,' he said, paying no attention to Théroigne's head protruded from the window, and her shouts that he was not going the right way, and no one heeded her in the crowds running by, but suddenly the mob grew so dense that they could get no further, and had to draw up; the space before the palace was filled with a sea of heads, which seemed to waver backwards and forwards, and instead of the sharp ring of musketry or boom of cannon there was a great hush of expectation, broken by a single voice, which seemed parleying with the besieged. Only a word or two reached the outer circle of the throng, and the answers from the palace were equally inaudible, but they were caught by those nearest, and repeated, a deafening cry of joy and applause rose up; men flung their hats aloft and waved the banners of the sections; women shrieked with ecstasy; the multitude swayed to and fro, the gates of the Palais Royal were flung open, and those within rushed forth to embrace and fraternise with their enemies of a moment before. From end to end of the Rue St. Honoré and all through the palace gardens the mob, frenzied with delight as just before it had been with rage, danced, sang, shouted, poured into the Tuileries, and thundered at the doors of the room where the Convention were sitting, all unconscious of

what had passed, to call on the representatives of the nation to share their joy. Théroigne, carried away by the universal excitement, had sprung out of the *fiacre*, though still holding the door fast, and screamed with the rest; Isnard, from his perch, waved his red cap, and looked keenly round for a chance of freeing himself from her, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan asked Balmat, who had got in to reassure her, 'Are they all raving mad? is it an émeute or a fête of universal brotherhood?'

'The *Maratistes* wanted to revenge Marat's death, and set everyone at his neighbour's throat,' he answered, having picked up enough to understand what had happened, 'and assured the faubourg that the merchants of the Palais were wearing the white cockade. They marched down as you see, but before they could come to blows someone with a grain of sense proposes to see if the thing be so; they find it is a fable; all here are good patriots it is cleared up, they mingle, embrace with tears as you see Yonder come the members of the Convention what luck! we have only just escaped civil war, and only see how much there is to plunder!'

Just then, while the enthusiasm was at its height, and the members of the Convention were embracing and embraced amid deafening applause, Isnard jumped down, recognising two *gens-d'armes* in the crowd, who however did not know him in the least, though they had twice tried to find and arrest him, and thrust the warrant into the hand of one.

'Arrest her,' he whispered, pointing to Théroigne, 'she belongs to the Comité Révolutionnaire. Quietly, you understand; Fouché wants her out of the way. Pay no attention to anything she says.'

The men nodded significantly. Arrests were so frequent and informal that they would hardly have asked for the warrant, and the female clubs, headed by the infamous Rose Lacombe, had made themselves so insupportable a pest to the Convention that this order seemed the most natural thing in the world. Before Théroigne knew what was happening to her she was in their grasp; her furious shrieks and struggles were unnoticed in the tumult of rejoicing. Isnard did not wait to see the result of his *coup de main*; he shut the door of the *fiacre* with a triumphant clap, led his horse as best he could through the crowd into a side street, and then drove off at speed to the Maison Crocq, where Edmée was watching in

the utmost anxiety. Before Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could alight she was at the door.

‘Dear aunt! dear aunt!’ she whispered, clasping her close, with wet eyes, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan gave back her caresses almost equally moved. Isnard drove away exultant; Balmat and Edmée conducted Mademoiselle de St. Aignan upstairs full of thankfulness. Outside the tide of rejoicing swelled higher and higher; Paris was illuminated, and the streets thronged till late at night by a crowd who sang, drank, danced and howled for joy, as if fear and poverty and danger at home and abroad were things of the past. Isnard walked about with the rest, looking so unlike what he had done in the morning that when he lit upon one of the gens-d’armes whom he had impressed into his service, the man accepted his proposal that they should drink to the Palais Égalité, and the Faubourg St. Antoine, and the Republic one and indivisible, without any suspicion that they had ever met before, and was easily beguiled into relating how he had conveyed a prisoner that afternoon to Les Carmes who had given him more trouble than any, gentle or simple, whom he had ever before had to do with, and who was now safely lodged there under the name of Valentine St. Aignan.

CHAPTER XXII.

BETWEEN FLOOD AND EBB.

THE guillotine was busier than ever after the death of Danton, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan felt herself preserved from death, when she learned from the ‘Moniteur’ that twenty-seven prisoners had been taken to execution in one day from the Luxembourg alone. The lines from Racine, which Edmée had read her, were only too feeble to describe the state of terror and danger prevailing all through France. Sometimes a list of prisoners especially obnoxious to the Convention, or to some one of its members, was given; sometimes the victims were taken haphazard from all the eighteen provinces of Paris. The Convention had created a living

monster in the guillotine, whose hunger must be daily appeased by larger and larger sacrifices, lest it should devour its masters. Fouquier Tinville presided over the holocausts, and by the beginning of June no one knew how many heads fell daily. Cruelty seemed in the air, and the thirst for violent emotions only grew with what it fed on. There were some eyes which noted this, and wondered how the increasing difficulty was to be met. Bread and the games had ever been a Parisian cry, and bread was growing scarcer and scarcer, employment more difficult to obtain; half Paris was living on potatoes, though not long before all the efforts of poor Louis XVI. to make the vegetable popular had failed; the male population was flocking to the army; the women stood fierce and hungry at the bakers' doors, or besieged the Ateliers de la Guerre to demand work; and if the executions failed to amuse all this population, a counter-revolution would ensue. The symptoms were ominous. From different parts of the city came complaints that the dead, flung into pits, poisoned the air, though no one had ever thought of annoyance or danger arising from the hundredfold greater numbers buried regularly every year in the same cemeteries; and the Faubourg St. Antoine showed its displeasure when the guillotine was removed there from the Place de Concord, or Place de la Révolution, as it was now called, where it had stood near the great plaster statue of Liberty, designed in an unfortunate moment by David, who was sculptor as well as painter.

De Pelven was one of those watching the signs of the times narrowly and uneasily. It was nothing to a serenely philosophical mind like his which party triumphed; he had been unmoved by the tumult of indignation and hope, of enthusiasm and battle in '89, and had looked on with the same calm analysis of the situation ever since, but though neither Royalist nor Democrat at heart he was too deeply involved with the Republican party to transfer himself easily to any other. The tremendous current had hurried him further than he desired; no swimmer, however strong, could resist it and live. He was sitting in his little salon, making notes in cipher in a small book, with a worn and haggard look on his face, which had become habitual to it in the last few weeks, when, very little to his satisfaction, there entered Héron, the accredited police-agent to the Comité de Sûreté, and the secret spy of Robespierre. De Pelven had it as much

at heart as Robespierre himself not to be known to communicate with the police. All reports were conveyed to safe places, where he inspected them; he did not keep a single paper which could have compromised him in his house, where the mob or the gens-d'armes might have penetrated at any moment without seizing anything but the little book full of cipher, which he carried about his person, and if he required an interview with any police-officer, it was always given in some secure and unsuspected place, such as the *Maison Lafarge*. Unlike Robespierre he had no personal animosities, no fear of some rival overshadowing his renown, and never denounced anyone, though he always found someone else to do it if anybody thwarted or endangered his projects. No one dreamed of applying to him the dangerous epithet of 'Accuser in chief' with which Robespierre had been branded, and his only perils hitherto had been through a reputation for unpatriotic clemency. He appeared as a matter of course at the Jacobins, and was one of the nine members of the Committee of Public Safety, which had almost unlimited power, deliberating in secret, controlling the Ministry, and even able to suspend the decrees of the Convention, and he had organised Robespierre's secret police, of whose existence very few knew, though the results of their creation were universally felt, but as far as possible he kept out of sight, content with unsuspected power, and well aware that should it be dragged to light, half would vanish, and a swarm of enemies rise on all sides. It was therefore a displeased and enquiring look which he turned on the pale and troubled face of Héron, who answered by a gesture, and an exclamation of 'They are at it again! They are resolved to strike Robespierre through his friends.'

'How! have you been denounced a second time?' asked De Pelven, instantly perceiving the gravity of the circumstance; for a suspicion had got abroad that Héron was Robespierre's right hand, and already members of the Convention who dared not yet attack 'The Incorruptible' had tried to destroy his tool.

'Yes, and who can hope to escape twice? This evening they propose to denounce me again, and you also.'

'Together?' asked De Pelven, changing colour. 'That is well aimed. I know from whose hand that blow must come. But it is premature; Robespierre must stand by us for his own sake; he cannot do without us.'

'You think so? you really think so?' faltered Héron, studying De Pelven's countenance, where he had detected the expression of discomfiture, without guessing that it was not the danger but the association with himself which perturbed De Pelven.

'Undoubtedly; if he should desert us he would be defenceless.'

'But he dreads nothing so much as being supposed to rely on the police!' said Héron. 'You see no one is safe now the tide seems turning, and what could be done in such a case? The Terror cannot be made more formidable than it is.'

'That is our weak point. It has been allowed to reach the maximum; there is nothing left to dread, and people are getting used to it.'

'But it would be madness to try mercy,' said Héron, in great alarm. 'That plan has already destroyed Danton, and all who have tried it. And this evening I was told that Bourdon means to accuse us of possessing blank warrants of arrest, with which we gratify private animosities, a terrible charge—and its being false makes no difference!'

'It must be prevented; I must get possession of the tribune before Bourdon, and occupy the Convention with other matters. I have news from an agent with the army; Kléber has been driven back across the Sambre stay, there is good news to throw into the other scale; Thugut is growing sick of the war; he advises Austria to withdraw her troops from Flanders Pichegru will have it all his own way a week hence.'

'What good fortune! they will be able to think of nothing else!' said Héron, infinitely relieved. 'Either very bad or very good news would have done, but both at once! what luck! And your information is always extraordinarily trustworthy, citizen Pelven,' he added, with a touch of discontented envy. 'But our army. . . how does it take Hoche's imprisonment?'

'Ill; the army is terribly democratic,' said De Pelven, smiling slightly, 'though it has strongly resented the order to dismiss all aristocrats from the ranks. It does not seem to have been thoroughly obeyed,' and he opened his note-book, where he had set down the names of various men of noble birth, who, forced to emigrate, had joined the army which

was indomitably struggling with the allied forces gathered by Europe against revolutionary France. His eye rested for a moment on one which chanced to be of especial interest to him—that of Alain de St. Aignan, showing not only that he had altered his plan of escaping to England, but certainly was not in Paris.

‘You are sure that if even yet we should be denounced Robespierre will stand by us?’ asked Héron again, returning to a subject which had much greater interest for him than public affairs. The prospect of being guillotined seemed to be singularly disagreeable to him, though he had helped a multitude of people to find that road out of the world with the utmost composure.

‘I have said so already. But Robespierre should beware. He leans too much on that broken staff the priestly party. He has always protected it on the sly, and his project of liberty of worship, his fête of the Être Suprême is alienating numbers who think that to be successful the Revolution must be anti-christian. The name of an Être Suprême has a suspiciously monarchical sound about it.’

‘So I have told him a hundred times, citizen,’ said Héron mournfully, ‘but he will not listen.’

‘He wants to create, while the others want to destroy—there is an immense pleasure in destruction. Well, citizen Héron, you may be tranquil, no harm will come to either of us to-night at all events, but allow me to observe that you committed a grave imprudence in coming here uncalled for; it would suggest that we concerted plans together. Do not let it happen again. If you require to communicate with me, send a messenger whom you can trust—there is that Jobin who was a weaver, and finds it pay better to work for the police and agitate the sections, send him. I like that man.’

Héron rose to go, with an uneasy sigh. He had unlimited belief in De Pelven’s power, and did not doubt that he would slip through any net, however fine its meshes, but was it not possible that one might be less fortunate than the other? If a victim had to be offered up, it would certainly be Héron rather than De Pelven. He turned back at the door, to give a note which he had taken from the hand of a messenger who hurried away as soon as it was delivered. ‘From some prisoner!’ muttered the experienced agent of police, as he noted the manner of delivery, and the look of

the missive, and he lingered with professional curiosity to see what came of it, but he was quite unprepared for the effect on De Pelven, whose self-control he had imagined beyond being shaken. The news that a denunciation from a man like Bourdon de l'Oise was hanging over his head had left him completely unmoved, but scarcely had he cast his eyes on the short, ill-spelled letter than he started up, white with fury. 'Tricked! befooled!' he cried, with his eyes still upon it. 'Who can have organised this?' then seeing Héron, he recovered himself, and turned on him a look so coldly threatening that the spy slunk away cowed, though full of intense curiosity.

De Pelven knew well that his life depended on his forestalling and defeating the measures of those who were striking at Robespierre through him, yet he put off all steps to ensure his safety until he had hurried to Les Carmes, whence Théroigne had succeeded in sending him the news of her arrest and detention in the place of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. He could learn little from her beyond the bare facts, as unaccountable to him as to her, except that he saw that the mysterious 'he' of whom Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had dropped a hint must be concerned in it. De Pelven troubled himself little about Théroigne, having weightier matters than her imprisonment on hand, but, telling her that when tried she must find witnesses to show that she had been arrested in the place of another person, left her, unheeding her remonstrance that she should probably be executed without going through the ceremony of a trial at all, or perish in another such massacre as had already once made the name of Les Carmes odious.

All turned out as he had foreseen at the Convention; his enemies delayed the attack which they had prepared, for public attention was absorbed by the private intelligence brought forward by De Pelven, which indicated a new and unexpected turn in the fluctuating fortunes of the campaign, and a tacit admission that France, beggared, revolutionised, distracted, could yet hold her own, with her ardent, inexperienced young armies, against the veteran soldiers of Europe. So occupied was the whole assembly, from the Montagne to the Droite with the news that they had little attention to spare for a member who appealed for a hearing to read a report full of anxious and weighty matter from his department

of the state of anarchy prevailing there and elsewhere. The complaint was answered by a brief order that certain culprits named in the report should be sent to Paris to stand their trial. De Pelven found some interest in this hasty debate, if no one else did, when amongst the places named as especially unfortunate he caught the name of the Commune of St. Aignan, and gathered that it was tyrannised over by a man risen from the people, who was acting, according to the complaint lodged against him, 'like a seigneur.' It seemed that he had the habit of imprisoning under trivial accusations any neighbours who had money, and obliging them to buy their liberty at five or six hundred livres each; that he had obliged the peasants to labour unpaid on the 'biens nationaux' which he had acquired in the last year; that he bought wheat cheap to sell dear, and finally that he had prevented the ex-parish priest from marrying as a good patriot should, and even shut up the girl on whom this honest man had set his affections. All this betrayed a state of things very far from satisfactory, and was but too true a picture of the condition of many departments, but it was the name of the offender which riveted the interest of De Pelven, for he had learned it from Edmée, in those conversations which seemed now to have taken place long ago, though in reality only a few months had passed since he met her at Mortemart. It was Jacques Pierre Leroux.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REMINISCENCES.

'No, I cannot see it,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with a hasty, impetuous gesture. 'You may say what you like, child, and I know that you fully believe every word of it, but I tell you the thing is impossible. There are things which a gentleman cannot do. Tell me that he is a gamester, immoral, cruel, and I will believe it. I have seen all that in my time; you may be that and yet be a gentleman still, but that De Pelven should have been cognisant of my arrest,

have intended to use it as a weapon against you, that I cannot credit.'

'But, dear aunt, he did not even take the trouble to deny it,' urged Edmée.

'*Ta, ta ! ma charmante !* You misunderstood him. Have I not already explained to you that it was for a friend he pleaded to me ? You have no experience of these sort of things ; you mistook him, otherwise why did he procure my release ? He had no easy task to do it either, and he laughingly told me that if it were known he should never have another peaceful moment, for his door would be besieged with women, imploring him to use his influence to gain the freedom of their relations. The men in power are absolutely afraid of liberating anyone on that very account. What must he think of my disappearance ! he ought to be set at ease at once, and I shall write immediately to him.'

Edmée looked despairingly at Balmat. The argument was no new one ; it had been repeated daily ever since Mademoiselle de St. Aignan came to the Maison Crocq. She either could not or would not believe in De Pelven's treason, and his visits and agreeable conversation were a great loss to her ; the society of honest Balmat and Madelon Crocq was a poor substitute for that of De Pelven.

'I should think that Madame Alain was likely to know what this Pelven said to her better than anyone else, especially as no one else heard it,' observed Balmat, who had been on the point of going out, but paused to come to Edmée's aid.

'My good Balmat, this is a matter with which you have nothing to do ; outsiders should not mix themselves up with family affairs ; go you to your painting,' answered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with good-humoured hauteur.

'When a man has risked his life in a business, it can hardly be said that he has nothing to do with it,' returned Balmat, not a whit abashed ; and the remark was so just that for a moment it silenced her, though, as she afterwards said to Edmée, the *roturier* peeped out in thus indelicately recalling the obligation which she lay under. Balmat, quite unconscious of his offence, took advantage of the silence to add, 'I hear some things now and then of the man——'

'If you mean my cousin, M. de Pelven, I should know him better by that name,' interposed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan

‘Which bear out all that Madame Edmée says,’ continued Balmat, who seemed fated this morning to sin without discovering it; ‘we are out of his grasp for the time, but a bloodhound has not a keener scent; it will be a miracle if he do not find us. Till then, let it alone and be thankful, say I. Let him who has a waxen head keep out of the sunshine!’

And he went out, his portfolio under his arm.

‘Are you going to David’s atelier?’ Edmée asked, as he was closing the door.

‘No, they do not pose the model to-day. If I am wanted you will find me at the Augustins.’

‘Where does he say?’ asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, dropping a subject in which she felt herself worsted.

‘He cannot see to draw in his garret overhead, so he has made a sort of studio in the cloister of the Augustins. I have been there. Ah, mademoiselle, what a sight the church is! the painted glass gone, the wind and rain beating in, the high altar shattered to pieces, and a statue of Liberty in the red cap fastened against one of the pillars! I found a corner where I could kneel and pray; I go there sometimes, but once I was so terrified, a man came in without my noticing him, and said “How! you hold to those mouldy old superstitions! we will guillotine you!” but he went away laughing. Balmat was full of fear for me, however.’

‘Do you say that he has his atelier there?’

‘Yes, in a corner sheltered from the weather, and where he has contrived to make a good light. It was terribly cold in winter, he says; the brush would drop from his fingers without his feeling it, but he has a will strong enough to dry up the Seine! he persisted. I hope that he will not be turned out when the monuments and all the other things from convents and churches are taken there. It is to be made a National Museum, he says—the poor church!’

‘Does he draw well, this young man?’

‘Ah, it is so sad and strange! He adores his art; he has loved it all his life, and he draws wonderfully with crayon or charcoal, but the moment he takes a brush and tries to paint, or above all to compose, he can do nothing. He says that David encourages him to persevere, and study severely the antique, but that it is only out of kindness, and it breaks his heart!’

‘Poor fellow!’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, really

touched, 'that explains his anxious and sorrowful looks. How does he live?'

'Very hardly; he has made a little money by portraits; his sketches are astonishingly faithful, as you know, and also he works between-whiles at watch-making, with a compatriot whom he knows here. Sometimes he has even helped Madelon's nephew, that black-bearded man, to carry loads on the quais. He would starve, I think, sooner than ask help from his family, for to send him here his sisters were forced to diminish their little dowries.'

'You seem to know all about him, child!'

'Yes, I do,' answered Edmée, simply; 'he has told me all about his early life in Switzerland, and his family, and we have talked a great deal about his prospects. He was so good to me in the dreadful days when you were in the Luxembourg!'

'That is all very well, *ma toute belle*, but do not forget that you are the Comtesse de St. Aignan, and our good Balmat a watchmaker's son,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who, in spite of her interest in the Huguenot printer, had come out of prison a great deal more of an aristocrat than she went in. 'One can expect nothing else in a man not *né*, but really his want of tact, his *brusquerie*, are trying. To call a person of good birth "that man," for instance, as he did just now!'

'I think because he is a Swiss and is used to a Republic he neither hates nor respects a title as people do here,' said Edmée, who, if she had not learned to sympathise, had at least begun to understand through Balmat what the feelings of a temperate Republican were.

'Well . . . it may be so,' and then, as if the subject had reminded her of her fellow-prisoner, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan added, 'I saw my poor printer's name in the "Moniteur" yesterday, next to the Abbé de Beaumont's. When I left the Luxembourg, the poor abbé ran after me with my snuff-box, which I had dropped, and said "Adieu, dear Mademoiselle; you go forth to freedom, and I shall go forth to investigate the great Perhaps!" I used to know him a little formerly,—the best card-player I ever met, but he would never play for money; when the abbé played the stakes had to be a dozen of Toquay, or a Perigord pie.'

'Ah, mademoiselle, how different your life was then! how hard this must seem to you!' said Edmée, glancing sor-

rowfully round at the miserably furnished room, which her resources were far too scanty to allow her to improve.

‘Not so much as you think, my child. My father was one of the poorest of men in France when I was a young thing; it was not till I was grown up that we inherited the fortune gained by an uncle in America—not great riches, you understand, but enough to raise us into affluence, and then my eldest brother married a wealthy heiress; my father hesitated for some time, but at last gave his consent, as my mother had it greatly at heart.’

‘Hesitated whether Monsieur your brother should marry my godmother!’ cried Edmée.

‘Why yes, for after all though the *noblesse de robe* has always been highly esteemed, it has never had the *entrées* at Versailles, or the privileges which we, the *noblesse de l’épée*, inherit—that is a thing of course. Still, it was very different from marrying into a financial circle; that would have been out of the question. It was a strangely lonely life that I led, now I look back. My brother was with his regiment, and hardly ever came home. I was the youngest of all. My sister Pétronille became a nun, Lucile a canoness—then there were only four masters left in the château, my father and mother, myself, and the old uncle of whom I have often told you, house servants—a cook, my mother’s maid, two lacqueys and a coachman. My father had an old horse and a hound; he went out fishing or shooting every day when it was fine. War, duels, and the chase were the proper occupations of a gentleman, he used to say.’

‘And you, mademoiselle?’

‘I ran about in an old frock, patched all over, with my hair knotted on the top of my head, and an iron collar, covered with black velvet, round my neck, to make me hold myself up. Sunday was our great day, for then my mother and I went to the parish church. It was all gay as a cemetery! Sometimes some gentleman of the neighbourhood would ride up, and stay all night; my mother did not like the *hobereaux* to see our poverty, but my father used to say *noblesse passe richesse*; poverty could not make us *roturiers*, and welcomed anyone who chose to come, it did not happen twice in a twelvemonth. Then they talked about local matters, or the war in Hanover—it made a change, after all. The curé came to play at bowls with my father on a Sunday afternoon;

as for us, we prayed and did tapestry work from year's end to year's end.' She paused, recalling those bygone days with a smile and a sigh. 'Yes, it was dull enough!' she continued presently. 'Not a sound in the château but the great bell when it rang at noon for dinner, and the sparrows chirping and scolding the hawks which built in the tower. The sparrows have the best of it in these days, they have driven the hawks out!'

'But did you never go from home, mademoiselle?' asked Edmée, who, remembering the château in the gay days of its last owners, could hardly believe in this earlier state, which she now heard described.

'Never, child, we never thought of such a thing. I do not recollect the old *berlingot* ever being used. Our only gaiety was the annual fair; then our vassals came to fetch the seigneurial banner, and set it up in the midst; we children used to go down and hope that my father would buy us something, but he never did. Still, it was a gay sight, and we enjoyed it. It was important to us too, for every head of cattle paid so much to the Seigneur. My father was not a hard man, but he held to all his rights; he looked upon it as a duty to his order, and could not forgive those Seigneurs who allowed old customs and taxes to fall into disuse. And that was our only amusement.'

'Mademoiselle,' said Edmée, with a smile, 'I think you would almost have welcomed the Revolution!'

'My dear child!' answered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, energetically, 'you do not know how truly you are speaking! I am convinced that the *ennui* of people's lives had a great deal to do with the satisfaction with which at first the Revolution was hailed. It afforded something to discuss; then we were afraid of those brigands against whom the National Guard was formed, and who never existed—it was so amusing to be frightened!'

'We have had a great deal of such amusement since!'

'Too much; one is *blasé* with it now, but then—they are coming, they are not coming—they are at hand, they have been seen—no, they will not be here till to-morrow—and finally the brigands never came at all, but the Garde Nationale was formed, and that fact remained, and that is all which is important. Of course I had ceased to be young when all this began; after all it is but a very few years when

one comes to think of it, but there were many still leading such lives as I had, and feeling as I should have felt. My father had died years before, happily for him; the changes would have killed him. That Matthieu de Montmorenci and a De Noailles should have proposed to abolish titles would have been alone the death of him. All the world was mad then, but what a generous madness it was! And to think where we have drifted to now!

‘How will it end?’ murmured Edmée, ‘and will the *émigrés* ever return?’

‘Return! of course they will, and when one whom we know does so, I shall have a great deal to tell him of the tenderness and care which a certain little girl showed his provoking old aunt,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, drawing Edmée to her. ‘He ought to love you for that alone, my child.’

Edmée sighed. Somehow she did not wish for Alain’s love as a return for what she had done; it seemed too like a debt of honour which Alain must needs pay. Alain had grown very real to her; she could hardly tell why; Balmat had talked of him; De Pelven had taught her to contrast his conduct with the Chevalier’s, very greatly to the advantage of the latter, but yet this was not the explanation. Love sometimes feeds on itself in absence, and grows strong in so doing; perhaps it was so with her, for Edmée’s was essentially a romantic nature. ‘I wonder if he ever thinks of me?’ she would say to herself, and from the little which she knew or could learn, she constructed an Alain to whom she felt herself curiously responsible. She was roused from thoughts of him by Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s question,

‘How does the purse hold out, child? All going out and none coming in makes it very light, I fear.’

Edmée could not deny it, and the fact was a grave one, for she did not see how to refill it. She hastily took up a muslin handkerchief which she was embroidering for a shop where Madelon had found her employment, and felt guilty that she had wasted at least half-an-hour in talk. Unfortunately Mademoiselle de St. Aignan did not like to see her at work when she wanted to talk and be listened to.

‘I detest those muslin rags,’ said she, impatiently. ‘I do believe that those flimsy stuffs were the beginning of all the troubles. There never would have been a revolution if

people had kept to brocade and point-lace. I recollect the scandal when the Court took to India muslin, and we in the provinces could hardly believe it. I have heard that the Duchesse de Lauzan received a present from her grandmother, the Maréchale de Luxembourg, of an apron of sailcloth, trimmed with point, as a protest against the new fashions, but it was of no use; people took to dresses of *soupirs étouffés*, and caps of *conquête assurée*. But if you must toil all day, I would rather see you paint. Alain has a great taste for painting; he could not openly indulge it, for his father thought it unbecoming a man of rank; but I believe he pursued it in secret.'

'And, indeed, I would rather paint,' answered poor Edmée, with a wistful look towards her pallet and colour-box; 'but who cares to buy anything but necessities now!'

'You are wrong, child; neither money nor morals seem worth care in times like these. I saw that even in the short time I was in the Luxembourg. Things were bad enough, Heaven knows, before '89. I was in Paris for a few months, and the state of things amazed me; the magistracy were ashamed of their profession; their wives wanted to be great ladies; there was no religion; if the Saviour were named in a sermon, it must be as the great Lawgiver of the Christians.

You might ape an Englishman, an American, only not be a simple Frenchman; but now it is "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." One lady said to me in the Luxembourg, "If I am cruel to him to-day, I may have no time to make up for it to-morrow!" No, never could I have imagined such a state of things—it was as if the end of the world were at hand—and everyone, except a few who were veritable saints—crazy with recklessness.'

'I hope to sell a little more lace; some people wear it still, and Madelon has found me a purchaser; she cannot sell her own, though she makes it beautifully, because before coming to Paris she had unfortunately sworn on the gospels only to supply one particular person, who used to come to her village, and buy all that the women made there, and she does not know what has become of him.'

'Indeed! It is remarkable, for she has the little fault of loving money, our good Madelon, and, I fear, might turn us into the street if we could not pay our rent, which is, moreover, not small.'

‘I do not think that she would do that, though she does make us pay highly. She is patient with those poor people in the rooms next us, and lets the wife pay by doing little services, when they cannot otherwise.’

‘I cannot say; I think if she had to pay her own ransom, she would prefer dying to part with the money,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; ‘but she is a good woman, though plain, a *vrai jambon*, no shape at all! Still, I would rather see her than that Théroigne.’

Edmée shuddered. She could not forget the hideous details, the vile language inflicted on her by their former landlady. She thought that rather than face her again she would almost take refuge in the Conciergerie itself.

CHAPTER XXIV

A RECOGNITION.

OF all the startling and absorbing events which had filled the last two years, and they had assuredly been neither few nor far between, none, perhaps, had more occupied Paris than that festival whose very name startled all ears, the Fête of the Être Suprême, which Robespierre had decreed for the 7th of June. ‘The idea,’ he had said, in a speech as fervent as the one in which some years before he had pleaded for the total abolition of capital punishment, ‘the idea of the Supreme Being, and of the immortality of the soul is a continual call to justice; it is therefore a social and republican principle.’ Hébert had proclaimed atheism; the leading Girondins had urged the Convention to banish the name of the Divinity from the constitution; Danton had laughed to scorn the thought of another world, and a Judge of men; Robespierre, therefore, before whom all these men had successively fallen, stood forth as the champion of Providence. The sensation produced by this step, not only in France, but throughout Europe, was as indescribable as it was complicated. Numbers hoped that it foretold the end of the Revolution, and already in imagination saw the desecrated churches

re-opened, and persecution a thing of the past, while others passionately recoiled from seeing the cause of religion upheld by such a champion, and others again scarcely suppressed their burning rage and disgust at seeing the first step taken towards restoring that Christianity which the clergy had taught them to confound with the stake, with opposition to progress, with tyranny of conscience, and light and useless lives, led at the expense of others, so that while one would cry with *naïve* wonder and joy, 'What a grand decree! there is to be a God!' another with passionate tears exclaimed, 'That scoundrel Robespierre! he has determined that we shall have a Supreme Being!'

Echoes of all these various phases of feeling reached the Maison Crocq, though in general politics were little discussed there, for Père Crocq was either jovial at his café, or smoking sullenly in his kitchen, and Madelon far too busy to concern herself with such subjects; her black-bearded nephew, Michonnet, too, troubled himself little with them; in fact, for two years or more a great indifference to politics had fallen on the Parisians; the meetings of the sections had gradually become deserted, except by those bribed to attend them; the novelty of having a hand in governing themselves had gone off, and the people had relapsed into the habit, learned through centuries, of allowing everything to be settled for them, and accepting it passively. There had been a moment when even the club of the Jacobins seemed dying out; but Robespierre had galvanised it into new life with terrible success. The Parisians had grown tired of public affairs, as they have of a great many things, before and since. Some, like Balmat, were too much absorbed in private concerns to care for anything beyond them. He had come to Paris to learn to paint, and David's atelier was his world. This fête, however, had a great interest for him, though as a religious ceremony he regarded it with wondering pity; all the details were planned by his master, David, 'Commissaire de la Convention,' who had been altogether carried away by the excitement of the times, without any rooted convictions, had voted the King's death, and declaimed in honour of Marat after death, and was entrusted with the organisation of all the Republican fêtes. His fame as an artist stood so high that men of all ranks and of every shade of opinion agreed

to see in David only the best painter of the day, and flocked to his atelier, from the aristocratic Comte de Forbin to the ultra-Republican Dubois, who outraged even the little decency of language and manners then expected. One thing in common he and they all had, a vague but immense belief in the future, and all, unconscious that with few exceptions they were destined to die young and unknown to fame, fully believed themselves destined to regenerate the world. Balmat, indeed, was an exception; but then he was of another race and temperament to his fellow-pupils. It was a period of brief and fervid life of exultation, soon to die into darkness, though its effects continue to this day. David represented the tastes and opinions of the general public, and both led and was led by it. Thence came his strength and his weakness, but no one yet saw how much was false and temporary in his popularity, for he was *facile princeps* among the painters of France, and the fame of his pupils, Gros and Géricault, was scarcely dawning.

Since David was, to his pupils at all events, the chief figure in the programme of June 7th, Balmat took it as a matter of course that he must be present too, as did Michonnet, since he was a favourite model, and would have felt it a slight to the great master, if his presence did not grace the scene, though Isnard and others had not spared their jests when he thus stated the case. Michonnet knew too well what was due to himself and David, to be moved, renounced a day's work to attend the fête. Madelon shrugged her shoulders and held her tongue, too sensible to waste words, but muttering, '*Grand imbécile, va!* for me I go not to *c'tte bêtise!*' and stayed at home, rather to the disappointment of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who was immensely entertained by the whole thing, and though she would as soon have gone to one of the low performances in the Palais Royal theatre as have condescended to be present at Robespierre's fête, very much wished for a more detailed and lively account than she was likely to get from Balmat, whose forte, as she observed, was not narration. To Edmée, as to thousands of others, the whole thing was a blasphemous parody, from which she shrank in horror, and she could hardly forgive Balmat for his proposal to escort her. 'But you would see David,' he urged, surprised at her indignation, on which she had turned away almost ready to quarrel seriously with him. He had no time

to stay to reason, and hurried off, while she was anxiously counting how much money remained after paying the week's rent, due that day, and sure to be punctually claimed by Madelon. Indeed, her step was heard almost before Edmée had the money ready, but she came in with red eyes, and so little of her usual alacrity in receiving her money that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan enquired in wonder what had troubled her. She struggled with a sob before she could answer. 'It is Crocq, madame, my man. he has been listening again to some of his imbecile friends, who tell him that I keep him under my slipper, as if it were not all for his good, and he says says. he shall divorce me for "incompatibilité d'humeur."' "

'My poor Madelon!' cried Edmée, indignantly. 'You who are so good a wife, and work so hard to keep all straight!'

'Do I not, madame? Is it not so? But what does that count? A woman must go up and down the house, must tramp out in rain and mud all day, while the man is at his café, reading the *Sentinelle de la Nation*, and when he comes home, does he say, "Art thou tired, *ma bonne amie*?" not he! It is "Where then is my supper?" "Give me money," the money which she has been working her ten fingers off to earn, and then he pockets it, without so much as a "Thank you," and well if she does not get a blow! Ah, it is a hard life, that of a woman!'

'But, after all, my good Madelon, you would be better off without him,' suggested Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

'I am not so sure of that, madame,' answered Madelon, hastily; 'he is not much worse than others. It is very difficult to be a man, and imitate the saints.'

'But if you were free of him you would have all your earnings, and a quiet house.'

'Yes, yes, no doubt, but it is of him that I think! What will become of him if I am not there to take care of him? If you only knew what a poor wretch he was before I married him, and to think that he may return to that condition! It breaks my heart!' and, throwing her apron over her head, she went out sobbing aloud, and forgetting for once to count her money. Edmée took her embroidery, hoping by industry to gain time to paint a little; Balmat took great and generous delight in her talent, encouraged and advised her, and, though unsuccessful himself, proved an excellent critic. He

had brought her that morning a handful of lovely June roses, whose deepest shades seemed only darkened light, which he had begged from an old flower-painter, whom he knew something of, who lived, like many other artists, in the Louvre. Edmée listened with delight to all that he could tell her, and longed to see the beautiful flower-pieces of which Balmat spoke, but he did not give her the slightest hopes of being admitted into M. Lafleur's studio, where no visitors were permitted. She gathered that this artist was old and peculiar, kind at heart, under an assumed misanthropy, making flowers take the place of friends and family, and would think to herself, 'Balmat has no enterprise! If I had but time to paint seriously, I would somehow find the way into that atelier!' The need of daily bread kept her closely to her needle, but to please Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, she now came and sat at the window, where her aunt had placed herself, with the 'Moniteur' of that day on her lap, divided between its contents and observation of the animation which pervaded even the dull little street where they lived, known in those days as the Rue du Bon Patriote. All Paris was flocking to the fête, and rejoicing in the prospect of tranquillity and clemency which Robespierre's late speeches in the Convention had held out.

'See, there goes Père Crocq!' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, 'see his ear-rings and *bonnet rouge*! and there is Michonnet, in a new cravat; look at their bouquets!—everyone carries flowers or boughs. it really is very pretty.

That poor Madelon! if she could but believe it, how much better she would be without that husband of hers! Women are silly creatures. That pale thing on our floor, however, seems to live well with her husband. I have seen nothing of them lately, beyond the children playing on the stairs.'

'Madelon is talking to Madame Amat now; do you not hear? She seems angry; perhaps they cannot pay her. Ah, the poor husband is ill; they want Madelon to go for a doctor.'

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was not attending. Her eyes had passed from the list of theatrical entertainments given in the 'Moniteur' to the death-list, always given next it, and a name there had struck her.

'What do you say? Yes, certainly. See what can be

done,' she answered absently, her chief wish just then being to get rid of Edmée, who went across the landing to ask if she could help her poor neighbour, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan hastily read a paragraph which she had discovered further on, announcing, in the usual inflated style of the 'Moniteur' that the Republic had done justice on certain culprits found guilty of defrauding the nation to their own private advantage. Amongst them was the name of Jacques Leroux.

'An excellent thing!' was her inward comment, 'he would have been unspeakably in the way by and by, if order ever come out of this chaos, and no doubt he richly deserved what he has got. Such a live father-in-law would have been a disgrace to the Chevalier, but a father-in-law who was guillotined is rather *comme il faut*. Still, though the child is not likely to regret him, it may be well she should not see all this,' and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan got the newspaper out of sight before Edmée came back. 'Madelon will not go,' she said, looking troubled. 'She says that she cannot leave the house when neither Crocq nor Michonnet is at home, and that poor Amat is seriously ill!'

'Would you have me leave the *rez de chaussée* empty, and on a day like this, when all the thieves are astir, looking for houses whose inhabitants are fools enough to desert them?' cried Madelon angrily from the landing-place. Her own trouble had made her unsympathetic for those of others. 'Send your girl, *ma bonne!*'

'I have already told you that Viérgie is gone instead of me to work, since I could not leave my poor husband,' wailed the wife, wringing her hands. 'Holy Virgin help us! he will die before night unless we have M. Collot.'

'People do not die so easily as all that, and none of us get just what we want when we please,' said Madelon, tramping downstairs, the more surly because her conscience pricked her.

'Has he been ill long?' Edmée asked, standing in her doorway.

'Not now, citoyenne, but once before he had a similar attack, and that good Dr. Collot, of whom you may have heard, cured him, but he bade me send for him at once and lose no time if the attack returned. See how ill he is!'

Through the opposite door Edmée could see the gaunt,

unshaven figure, crouched in a chair, unable to suppress groans of pain, while several little children huddled together affrighted.

‘Is there nothing you can do?’ asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, coming forward.

‘Yes, a little; I have poultices almost ready, but it is the doctor that we need; he lives Rue Dubois, near the Place de la Révolution. If I could but leave my husband but I dare not, as you see.’

Her imploring eyes sought those of Edmée, who hesitated, struggling with her dislike and fear of going out this day, and into the very part of Paris where the throng would be greatest, since the crowning scene of the fête was to take place in the Champ de Mars. ‘I will go,’ she said, at last; ‘dear aunt, you do not object? I will not be long gone. What number?’

She went downstairs and out of the house before her neighbour’s thanks were ended; Madelon saw her go, and muttered angrily, ‘It is always those who make most noise who get most pity,’ but she carried up a bowl of soup later, which the children were very glad of, even if the sick man could not eat it, and after that a conviction came upon her that Crocq would come home with wiser thoughts than those he had gone away with, as indeed proved the case, and she felt much more in charity with her surroundings.

Edmée, as she had expected, found all the world in the streets, with a gay and holiday air such as Paris always readily assumed, even in such times as these, and the green leaves and flowers carried by everyone made the streets like a shifting parterre. Garlands and flags hung from every window, and wreathed every balcony; gay and animated faces looked out from amid the frames of blossoms and foliage; the air was full of the delicious scent of roses, which had been brought into the city from twenty leagues round, to adorn the houses and strew before the procession. There was a universal hum of conversation, songs and laughter, but as she went along her ear caught remarks whose audacity astonished her. In fact, though spies were everywhere, it was and always had been impossible to bridle Parisian tongues, and Robespierre could no more do it than the kings whom the French had learned to consider their worst enemies. The crowd of spectators poured out of every street,

alley and house, and bore her easily along, while the general gaiety and excitement affected even her, little as she was attuned to them. She reached the house indicated to her, and was glad to find the physician at home, and to receive a promise that he would not fail to visit the Maison Crocq early in the day, but when she tried to make her way back against the stream, she found the attempt impossible. The throng was now so dense in the Rue St. Honoré that she could only slip into a doorway and wait, an unwilling though far from uninterested spectator. As was joyfully observed, the guillotine had been removed from its usual place the evening before, and as all fondly hoped for ever. Before the Tuileries a long arcade had been erected, garlanded with flowers and foliage; within was the tribune and amphitheatre prepared for the Convention, and the question was buzzed on all sides, what was to be said or done from this tribune, which seemed prepared for some special purpose. Someone asserted that Robespierre would proclaim a general amnesty from it, and the suggestion ran at once through the crowd, and was received with a deep murmur of delight which showed that Paris was weary of blood and weeping. What indeed could be more appropriate to such a fête? The popular excitement rose higher every moment, and the throng grew more and more dense; rumours were circulated rapidly through the spectators within the court-yard and gardens to the less fortunate ones outside, reporting what was taking place. The members of the Convention were coming; they were taking their seats; the procession would soon arrive; only Robespierre was not there—he was still at home—no, he was coming, no, again; he was breakfasting in the Pavillon de Flore—breakfasting, while everyone was waiting! impossible. So it proved however, and though acclamations from the mob welcomed him as he hurried to his place, his colleagues received him in displeased and significant silence, and scarcely listened to his speech, fragments of which alone reached the spectators. ‘What is he saying? What does he promise us?’ cried those in the streets, trying vainly to press into the interior of the Tuileries. ‘Let tyrants perish? Good. What else? what else?’ and a chill of disappointment fell on all when nothing more definite could be gathered. The swaying, shifting crowd brought now one wave, now another, of eager, upraised faces

past the step where Edmée stood, raised a little above the rest ; in the incessant murmurs which reached her ears she caught one which sent the blood to her heart with alarm ; a few bars, whistled low but distinctly, of the well-known Royalist air, 'O Richard ? ô mon roi !' 'It can be no one but Isnard !' was her instant thought, and looking round, saw Isnard himself, whom she knew well from a portrait of Balmat's, and the glimpses she had had of him when he assisted in the elopement of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. No one had noticed his mad bravado ; he had a very pretty girl on his arm, and was speaking laughingly to her when Edmée touched him. He started and turned sharply round, with a hand on something in the breast of his coat, but his mobile face lighted with a smile as he recognised her. 'You here !' he cried. A few words explained the circumstances, and he put the girl under his charge beside her, contriving to keep just below them, until they took pity and laughingly made room for him between them, as the crowd divided right and left, regardless of the merciless pressure inflicted on the ranks behind, to allow the procession to pass to the Champ de Mars. The members of the Convention led it, in a double column, with tricolour plumes and scarfs, each carrying a bouquet of poppies, corn-flowers, and ripe wheat ; one man, by chance or because the others had designedly fallen behind him, walked first and alone, and his dress, of a paler blue than his companions', his bouquet, still larger than theirs, increased the impression that he was master, and the others merely his attendants, but his step was embarrassed, his eyes downcast ; he raised them furtively as he went by the spot where Edmée stood, and the singular, snake-like look sent a cold shudder over her ; she did not need Isnard's low, fierce, 'Ah, tyrant, your hour has almost struck !' to tell her that it was Robespierre. No applause met him now ; the spectators were absorbed in observing the ceremony. A voice alone broke the silence by calling, 'Room for the Commissaire de la Convention,' and David passed by, waving his hat with its long tricolour plume, and trying to make the different groups of Republican officers keep in their places. Edmée recognised him too ; she had already seen those hard black eyes and slightly distorted mouth in more than one of Balmat's sketches, and did not need the explanation offered by her pretty companion of 'Louis David, our great artist !'—but

she could scarcely give him a thought; her eyes seemed forced to follow Robespierre, as shuddering she whispered, 'I feel as if a viper had touched me!' The girl beside her laughed gaily. 'Ah bah!' she cried, 'why will you let him spoil to-day to us? Let us enjoy ourselves; see how blue the sky is, how the sun shines! how delightful a crowd is! Ah, how comic are these grave messieurs of the Convention, with their flowers and their plumes!—see, one is looking at us . . . *tiens!* one would say he knew us . . . do you see?'

Edmée had not heeded the gay chatter, but now Isnard said low, 'Who is that who looks across here?' and his peculiar tone made her look over the heads of the crowd to the members of the Convention, still slowly filing past. 'Ah, heaven!' she faltered, turning white to her very lips, for the eyes fixed on her with a burning, menacing look were those of De Pelven. Isnard knew him too. '*Tais-toi, Laure!*' he said hastily, to the gay girl at his side. 'That man is her enemy . . . he can do nothing yet, he cannot leave his place, or send a spy through this throng; we have time. Keep where you are,' he added to Edmée; 'wait till the procession has passed.' At first the novelty, the gaiety of all around, the new feeling of having a girl of her own age, overflowing with light-heartedness beside her had carried Edmée away; that brief moment of forgetfulness was now cruelly paid for. She could not imagine how it had never occurred either to her or Balmat that De Pelven must necessarily be in his place as national representative, and that he would not fail to see her. She stood imprisoned by the wall of human beings in front, still feeling his eyes on her, though he had passed on out of sight, scarcely conscious that the long procession was passing before the enchanted eyes of the spectators, who closed in behind it, and flocked to the Champ de Mars, where a symbolical mountain had been erected, where the Convention and the musicians were to sit; she saw with outward eyes and absent thoughts the thousands of deputies go by, sent from all the sections of Paris, the old men bearing vine boughs, the young branches of oak, the women flowers, a long array, twenty-five thousand persons, defiling towards the Champ de Mars, under the walls of the Louvre and the Tuileries, across the square where the noblest blood of France had flowed like a river; sunshine overhead, sweet air around, and as the multitude reached the appointed spot, trumpets

sounded, and every voice was raised in the hymn of praise to the Supreme Being, while flowers were flung in profusion, mothers held up their children, men waved their sabres, and Robespierre sat enthroned on the summit of the mountain, with the Convention and the multitude at his feet, with an ominous pallid smile, which changed into a momentary look like that of one who finds himself on the edge of an abyss, as a voice in the countless throng said distinctly—‘Not content to be master, he makes himself God!’ A little movement as of frightened people recoiling showed where the audacious speaker stood, but it was impossible to distinguish him. The crowd having streamed into the Place de la Concorde, left space for Isnard and his two companions to leave their places. ‘Take her at once to Giboult’s shop, you know some of them there, and pass her through,’ was Isnard’s brief direction to the girl whom he was escorting, and he added to Edmée, ‘Ask no directions, lest they should be questioned by-and-by; go to the other door, turn right, then left, and then ask anyone for the Rue du bon Patriote. Adieu!’

‘But where shall I find you, *mon cher*?’ asked his pretty friend.

‘On the Place I will look out’—and he was lost in the crowd, while Laure, good-naturedly laughing at this brusque desertion, led Edmée towards the large draper’s shop which Isnard had spoken of. A word or two to the group who stood looking on at the door was received with smiling politeness, and sufficed to explain that the demoiselle was afraid of the crowded streets, and desired to go home by a quieter way than the main thoroughfare, and Edmée took farewell of her new friend, and found herself in streets so quiet and deserted on this day that when she wanted to enquire her road, she could hardly find anyone to ask. The doctor had reached the Maison Crocq before her; the sick man was in less pain, and but for the possible results of her expedition, Edmée would have been gladdened by the wife’s thankfulness. It was not possible to tell Mademoiselle de St. Aignan of her fears; she only related, as well as she could, what the order of the proceedings had been, and how she had encountered Isnard, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan listened greatly amused and interested, and insisted on a further account from Balmat, when he returned. Balmat

nad not much to say ; he reported that when Robespierre set fire to the group of monsters representing Atheism, Egotism, and Nothingness, they burned readily enough, but the statue of Liberty, instead of emerging pure and fair from the ruins, when the veil which they had hidden her with was consumed, had come out as smoky as a chimney-sweep, and that when Robespierre descended from the mountain he was even more livid than usual ; his lips were trembling, and he hurried away, with the Convention hurrying after him, and no one could understand what would happen next. Edmée related her meeting with Isnard, but waited for a private moment to tell Balmat her fears. He frowned at her praises of the pretty Laure. 'She is not a girl for you to know,' he answered briefly, and changed the conversation, but afterwards said to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, 'Isnard is no worse than others, but do not let him come here.'

'Why should he, my good Balmat? We are not likely to have any further acquaintance!' she answered, a little amused at the strait-laced views of the young Swiss, who could not unlearn the good and honest teaching of his home, though thrown into the whirlpool of Parisian life at one of its most perilous moments.

'I do not know when once one comes across people, it is odd how sure one is to meet them again,' said Balmat ; and the event proved him only too much in the right.

CHAPTER XXV

HIDE AND SEEK.

THE weeks which followed the Fête de l'Être Suprême quenched all the hopes which had been raised by Robespierre's apparent inclination to clemency ; alarmed by the discontent which it excited among some of his colleagues, he forgot how dangerous are disappointed hopes ; arrests came thicker, faster than ever ; at one time there was a razzia on all that remained of the high magistrature ; at another, all that still lingered of the Faubourg St. Germain was swept away. On

one occasion, about ten days after the fete, fifty victims, in the red shirt which had hitherto been the costume to mark assassins and parricides, perished together, under an accusation known to be false, and among them perished two whole families, not one member, old or young, escaping. But this spectacle, instead of striking terror into Paris, at last called forth an indignant protest from the public. 'It is too much? it is atrocious!' was heard on all sides, in defiance of the danger in sympathising with the condemned; and this revulsion of feeling was as strong among the lowest as the higher classes. Michonnet reported that a man known to him, a very giant of strength and stolidity, had laid a wager to look on without emotion, as each of the long file of victims moved on to lay his head under the knife, and that he had never stirred a muscle until the last, a girl scarcely beyond childhood, a poor little *ouvrière* arrested in a garret on the sixth floor, had quietly taken her place uncalled, and asked the executioner gently, 'Is that right, monsieur?' and then, as the axe fell, the great strong man had reeled and fallen back in a dead faint, and so was carried home. If people like Michonnet's friend were thus moved, it was certain that others were not only shocked and scandalised, but that a reaction had begun. Robespierre felt it, and drew back, dangerous and sullen, apparently neglecting public affairs, scarcely showing himself at the Jacobins, absent from the Convention, but striking blow after blow from his den. But his power was shaken; a shade of ridicule had attached itself to his later speeches; the tears, the pathos which he called to his aid had struck the Parisians, not as acting—that would have been suitable, even acceptable—but as bad acting, which was unpardonable. His hearers had smiled, and his enemies had caught at the weapons which he had unawares put into their hands. It would have been useless to tax him with barbarity, such an accusation would have been commonplace, and added to his strength rather than lessened it, but no man, standing before a Parisian audience, however terrible, however admirable he may be, can make himself absurd with impunity. Robespierre knew it, and had sent Fabre d'Églantine to the guillotine because he dreaded his pitiless mockery, but there were many Fabre d'Églantines left in Paris. Moreover, an enemy of a different sort was mining the ground under his feet, whom he had unaccountably for-

gotten to behead, that Fouché, destined soon to rise to a bad eminence. Strange things leaked out through him, horrifying the devout, infuriating the Democrats, of blasphemous mysteries practised in the house of Robespierre's tool, Cathérine Théos. The belief spread that he was aiming at dictatorship, perhaps monarchy. He answered the murmurs, faint as yet, but gathering strength, by fresh measures to purge the Republic. Somehow or other, he always discovered that it was of those dangerous to himself that the Republic required purging. The atmosphere grew thicker every day with crime and horror, but the public, though cowed, was no longer absolutely dumb and passive. Events occurred so fast and threateningly that the coolest heads grew dizzy. The crimes of the Revolution seemed as it were to be represented by this one man, standing aloft, conspicuous above the rest, as he had done when he took the topmost seat on the mountain erected in the Champ de Mars. The idea unavoidably suggested was to cast him down. No one, not even those most in his confidence, knew how far he was aware of his danger, and no one, not even Fouché, plotting incessantly to bring it about, nor Tallien, whose hand was to deal the blow, nor De Pelven, carefully disentangling the threads which connected them, but drawing away so gently that even the Argus eyes of Robespierre did not detect him, foresaw how near the supreme moment was.

In some respects De Pelven was following the same policy as Robespierre. He remained passive, awaiting the next turn in events, but he had made his value fully apparent to Fouché, of whose talents he had always had a very high opinion, and who looked on De Pelven as the man most likely to be useful to himself in future days. They had not much communication, but they understood one another.

His withdrawal from a wider sphere of action gave De Pelven the more leisure for prosecuting the search which he had never dropped after Edmée. The sight of her exactly when he was unable to utilise it had lashed him into fury, and he had sought her since with a kind of frenzy. Sometimes he visited the deserted Faubourg St. Germain and the Chaussée d'Antin, where grass began to grow in the streets, and between the pavement of the courtyards of empty hotels; sometimes he spent hours in the maze of little streets round the Cité, watching, enquiring, observing the windows, mal-

dened with baffled endeavours, and growing more absorbed in the search each day that it lasted, but never again seeing the dark soft eyes which had dilated with terror at the sight of him or the face which had blanched as he looked on it. Nor, for a long time, did he succeed in what he almost equally desired to do—identifying Isnard. Edmée's real danger lay there, and he was too acute not to fix on this point and concentrate his efforts on it. His searches for her were in obedience to the fierce craving to find her for himself, but it was Isnard whom he looked to as furnishing the clue to her retreat. To find a man whose name, dwelling, and profession were alike unknown seemed unhopeful, but De Pelven had a well-founded belief in the power of will, patience, and the secret police at his disposal, and felt certain that ere long he should learn all three.

Edmée could not know from what quarter danger threatened her, but she had been inclined to believe that some misfortune must fall upon her to expiate the sin, however involuntarily, of having been present at the blasphemous fête of the Être Suprême. As days passed, however, and nothing happened, the impression wore off, and her nervous fears yielded to the delight which sprang from an idea brought home from the very spectacle which she felt it a sin to have seen.

It was just then the fashion to carry large paper fans; she had noticed dozens furled and unfurled while she stood looking on, and her artistic eye had been not only displeased by the unadorned surface, but scandalised by the waste of so much paper which might have been used for drawing on. Meditating later on this, it occurred to her that the fans might be covered with wreaths and groups. The thought gave her that thrill of joy known to the discoverer, whether of a world or a new thought, and she hastened to communicate it to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan and Balmat, who was much taken with the idea, but told her that she would be more likely to hit public taste by groups of figures than by flowers alone. Her natural bent was for flower-painting, but she could draw figures with sufficient facility to make it a pleasure to her; besides, they could be garlanded with flowers. Balmat suggested subjects from 'Paul et Virginie,' and the poems of Ossian, just then the rage in Paris, where they were hailed as 'so primitive,' and admired with unquestioning

faith and enthusiasm ; all David's pupils studied them rapturously, except indeed Balmat, who could not admire them, but was ashamed of himself, and borrowed a copy for Edmée from his fellow-pupil, Maurice Quai, who had introduced them into the atelier. Edmée and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan were enraptured, and though Balmat's inveterate good sense rendered him unable to agree with their praises, he heartily admired the result of Edmée's study of the poems, even on such an ungrateful material as her green paper fans, and found a large shop ready to buy as many as she could furnish. To her great joy she was now able to put aside her embroidery for her brush ; it was not indeed quite what she would have chosen, but still it was painting, and sometimes she had time for more serious work on canvas. Edmée needed nothing to make her art dearer, but Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had unawares made it more precious than ever by her casual mention of Alain's love of painting, inherited from his mother, who had Italian blood in her veins, and many tastes inherited from Italy. It had always been a matter of regret to her that her husband had shown a narrow and marked aversion to his son's pursuing the study of art seriously, though it had never occurred to her, any more than to him, that it was possible for a man of birth and fortune to pursue it as a profession. The taste which Edmée had always shown from her earliest childhood for painting had much pleased her, and she had forwarded and encouraged it to the utmost, little guessing that one day the girl's talent would be the means of supporting not only herself, but one of the family to which she owed her first lessons in art. That Alain should perhaps be working like herself made a sweet and secret bond between Edmée and her young husband, of which she often thought, as she bent over her colours with looks which grew happier every day, now that she could return to her true calling. She did not earn much, but daily bread was secure, not only for herself, but what she thought more of, for Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and she delighted in the task which had gained it. Perhaps no happier condition could have been found. Balmat brought her flowers, sometimes she went to the *Marché aux Fleurs* and indulged herself in combining a bouquet; often Madame Amat, grateful for the kindness shown when her husband was ill, begged some choice blossom from a brother, who had a large

garden, once belonging to some noble, now the property of the nation, from which he rented it. Even Michonnet would occasionally bring home a huge armful of leaves and flowers, with the best of intentions, and the least possible perception of what could be of any use, and Madelon took a lively interest in everything which Edmée produced, admiring with enthusiasm equally unfailing and uncritical.

‘It is only too good to last!’ Edmée would say, ‘Oh, if only nothing would ever happen again!’ a sentiment in which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was very far from concurring. Her hankering after De Pelven was the thorn in Edmée’s new-born peace. It was less the straitened circumstances than the inaction which tried her. Since her father’s death she had led a very independent life, allowing herself to be accountable to no one, and enjoying unfettered dominion over her little kingdom at Mortemart. Besides this she had cultivated and literary tastes, and none of these could be satisfied in her present life, where society did not exist, and literature could only be obtained through the very questionable library where books were to be hired from a married priest, who had settled at the corner of the street, and adopted this means of eking out a livelihood. The novels of that day were not such as anyone with a grain of self-respect could read, and he had little else on his shelves. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan would not own it, but life was very dull to her. Edmée’s painting was her chief resource, and she could stand by watching her at work, and recalling anecdotes such as Edmée loved to hear. The little figure-pieces from ‘Paul and Virginia’ were especial favourites with her, for she had known Bernardin de St. Pierre in a visit to Paris. ‘I was here with your godmother in ’87,’ she said once as she looked over Edmée, who was designing the lost children, discovered in the forest, and brought home by rejoicing negroes. ‘We had come with my brother, who had some lawsuits to see after, which, thanks to her relations, we gained. We knew Vernet—Joseph, I mean; he was seventy-three that year, and nevertheless he sent twelve pictures to the Salon! We went more than once to his studio, and I recollect seeing a painting, just begun, of Virginie’s shipwreck; one saw, however, that the hand was losing its skill. He told us how he had hindered Bernardin from throwing the manuscript into the fire. He had read it aloud in Mademoiselle Necker’s

salon, and she had fidgeted all the while, Buffon only looked at his watch, Thomas went to sleep, M. Necker smiled sarcastically . . . in short it was a failure, and the poor author, then unknown to fame, was in despair.'

'A failure! "Paul and Virginia" a failure!'

'Even so, child, it was a novelty, and sometimes, when a novelty is good for anything, it requires courage frankly to admire it. You pledge yourself, as it were, for its success. "Read it to me while I paint," Vernet said, but soon he could not paint, he could only listen. "Publish! publish!" he cried, and we all know the verdict which has since been passed on the little *chef d'œuvre*.'

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan possessed in perfection the delightful art 'de raconter.' Edmée was never wearied of her reminiscences, and looked up now with a question intended to lead her on, when the words were arrested on her lips by hearing someone dashing up the stairs, the door was flung open, and as hastily shut, as Isnard rushed in, breathless.

'Hide me find some place to conceal me!' he cried, holding the door fast, and looking round like a hunted animal.

'Heavens! what has happened?' exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, 'who are you, monsieur, and what can we do for you?'

'It is M. Isnard, aunt, who helped to bring you here. . . whom I met on the day of that fearful fête,' said Edmée, rising in great alarm.

'Yes, yes, and it is owing to that day, to that meeting, I am in this danger. That bloodhound Pelven has had his eye on me; he thinks to find you through me. I have been watched and dogged, I knew it. . . Laure has sent me word. I had a message just now to bid me not come home as I turned the corner of this street I saw two men in wait for me, and barely gave them the slip. It is you who have brought me into this danger, you must hide me!'

He seemed frantic with terror, unable to listen, unable to hear reason.

'Alas, monsieur, how can we!—look round, there is not a place to conceal anyone,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, looking at the bare room.

'There is a wardrobe!' he answered, springing to the doors of the tall piece of furniture, and pulling them violently open.

‘It would be the first place searched. If we owed you no gratitude, we should assuredly gladly help anyone in distress, but see—how can we?’

He did not listen. ‘It is for you that I am in danger, save me, you must save me!’ he repeated, and then, as steps were heard coming he rushed to the window, ready to fling himself out to certain death.

‘It is Madelon, it is only our propriétaire,’ exclaimed Edmée, and he understood enough to draw back, though his look and manner alarmed the two defenceless women even more than the danger which he had brought them into. Madelon had heard him fly upstairs, and was come to see who had entered so unceremoniously. Edmée told her how things stood.

‘Isnard my nephew has spoken of him,’ said she. ‘Yes, yes, I understand, he has got into trouble like other people. Well, we must do what we can; I hid two people before you came, in this very room, and I daresay he will not be the last. Here, help me, citizen fugitive; move out this wardrobe; we must get it back as we can. Do you see,’ as Isnard, calmed by the ready offer of a refuge, obeyed her, ‘there is a deep doorway? No one would suspect it, and I will not say that it is luxurious to live in it, since you can only stand upright, but first one priest, then another, were very glad to be there during the days of September. If you are willing to run the risk, I am, mesdames.’

‘My good Madelon! that we are!’

‘Make haste then, monsieur; I think I hear visitors downstairs, already, who may not be welcome to you. Luckily my husband is out, and Michonnet is discreet. Ah, they know him; they are questioning him no matter.’

The wardrobe was scarcely in its place before the gens-d’armes entered. They observed the troubled faces of Edmée and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan suspiciously. ‘Your *cartes civiles*, citoyennes?’ they asked. The *cartes civiles* were unexceptionably correct. It had never been difficult to procure forged ones, as many Royalists, who haunted the Palais Royal, and drank and gamed and conspired there, knew very well, but the gens-d’armes were satisfied, only asking, ‘What was the noise we heard just now?’

The citoyenne here moved her table for a better light,’ answered Madelon promptly.

One of the men had a turn for botany, apparently. He stood looking with approval at Edmée's flowers, and then coolly took up her painting, and called his comrade's attention to the little half-finished group of figures.

'Perhaps, citizen, you know the story?' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, amiably, 'the little book of Bernardin—' she stopped herself just in time before adding the forbidden *de St. Pierre*.

'Bernardin? he speaks in our section; he is a good patriot; you mean the shoemaker of whom everyone has heard? our great orator,' said the man, evidently flattered. 'I did not know that he had written a book, but no doubt it is he. What is it about?'

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan found herself called on to 'raconter' unexpectedly. She did so with spirit which delighted the gens-d'armes and Madelon, and amazed Edmée, trembling lest Isnard should betray his hiding-place by some sound.

'Thank you, citoyenne, it is as good as hearing Bernardin speak. What a pity you cannot come and make speeches at our section; I'll answer for it you would be listened to!—So Bernardin wrote that book what a wonderful man he is!'

'Perhaps it was a relation,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, suppressing a laugh with difficulty.

'The poor little girl!' said the man, and there were tears in his eyes, 'if I had been there I would have got her somehow safe to land, whether she liked or not. I will tell my wife that story, and our next girl shall be called Virginie, that's settled. See, Antoine, these are good patriots, they read Bernardin's books, and the little one makes very pretty pictures about them. I should like that fan myself.'

'It is at your service, citizen,' said Edmée, and he opened and shut it with great satisfaction, while his companion, who had had no *cadeau*, looked discontented, and observed, 'By their faces when we came in one would have said they had half-a-dozen aristocrats in hiding, and it is I who say so.'

'But, citizen, all of your profession are not so polite as you; we could not tell that we should have such agreeable visitors,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

'That is very true, and we are losing time while the rascal we are after runs further,' said the happy possessor of the fan.

‘I should like to look in the cupboard first,’ said his ally, throwing the doors open.

‘Why a cat could not hide there come, I say.’

‘But there may be someone behind it.’

He gave a pull; Madelon advanced—‘Take care, citizen, let me help you; you will pinch your fingers thus.’

Perhaps she contrived that it should be so; at all events he drew back, shaking his fingers with a malediction on the wardrobe.

‘Here, let me look; nothing, as I thought,’ said the other man, ‘but we have not searched overhead yet.’

He dragged his companion off, nursing his fingers. No one spoke until the men were heard coming down from Balmat’s empty room, and examining the Amats’ Then they looked at each other, with unspeakable relief. Their hearts sank again as the door opened, and the first of the gens-d’armes looked in, but it was only to say, ‘Good day, citoyennes, it is all right,—a fan makes a good screen sometimes!’

He laughed and ran downstairs after his companion. They did not know whether he had only said it to frighten them, or if he had purposely shut his eyes. In any case the danger was over for the time. They released Isnard, who came out of his niche as cool as he had before been unnerved. ‘So far so good,’ he said, ‘in a few days I shall be able to dispose of myself elsewhere; until then, ladies, I must accept your kind hospitality; no doubt that good Balmat will give me a bed at night.’

‘Will not Laure be anxious?’ Edmée could not help asking.

‘I suppose so. It cannot be helped.’

‘But she may be in danger’—Edmée could not forget the gay and smiling girl, and felt for her more than it seemed Isnard did; but now he flashed into the fierceness which underlay his surface nonchalance. ‘If anyone hurt a hair of her head I will have his life,’ he answered.

‘It was by her you were warned?’ asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, startled by the fury expressed in every line of his plastic features; ‘you do not know what has become of her?’

‘How should I? I could only think of myself.’

‘Exactly,’ she murmured, observing him with a curious little smile, and afterwards she said to Edmée, ‘That young man is dangerous, and he is utterly selfish; if he loves it is

because the thing loved belongs to himself; he is his own first thought.'

Isnard showed no anxiety during the three days which he remained either about himself, or Laure, or the inconvenience and danger which his presence brought upon his hostesses. He considered that he had paid his quota to ill-luck, and could not be called on to pay tribute again for a long time to come, and his faith in his good fortune entirely revived. He made himself charmingly agreeable, but testified no gratitude to anyone, nor did he think it worth while to apologise to Balmat for taking possession of his bed. It was indeed a feature of the times that people were continually found ready to risk their lives for strangers whose very names were unknown to them, but usually a little more gratitude was shown than Isnard displayed. No one, beyond the few in the secret, suspected his presence, but his entertainers never were free from the fear of another domiciliary visit, and Madelon was much afraid of any hint of the matter reaching Père Crocq, who might babble it all out when he had had too much wine; and when at last Isnard departed, with some graceful thanks, they all breathed a great deal freer, however good company they had found him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE 9TH OF THERMIDOR.

'So that is the great poet of our insular neighbours!' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with some wonder and a tinge of contempt, as she laid down a volume of Letourneur's translation of Shakspeare which Balmat had somewhere borrowed, and took great delight in. 'I never supposed that our good Balmat was a very critical judge, but still, from his enthusiasm, I expected better things. One would not look for the polish, the grace of a Corneille or a Racine, but I could not have conceived such breaches of the unities, such vulgar personages on the scene, such as one might meet with in any street three old women capering round a pot; grave-diggers jesting over their work—it is unimaginable!—But among the blind

a one-eyed man is king, and probably the English have no great poets like ours. Where can that Balmat be? we have not seen him all day, and I had asked him to share our supper.'

'Did you!' said Edmée, with some alarm, as she placed on the table the one dish which she had prepared, and the coffee made of dried peas, sweetened with honey, which formed the usual supper of many whose means were far less restricted than theirs, for nothing was more dangerous than to be guilty of 'luxury,' and luxury being a comparative term just then, meant what at another would have been called bare necessities.

'There is abundance, *ma bonne amie*, you need not disquiet yourself. Surely he will come. Do you think the poor fellow always has enough to eat?'

'I often fear not, dear aunt; certainly at one time he did not, until he gave part of the day to watch-making, and he actually left David's atelier because he could not afford the twelve francs a month which the pupils pay, but David found it out, and told him to return.'

'And our Swiss was not too proud?'

'Oh no, he is too sensible for that, and he is far from the only one of the sixty pupils taught gratis. He will himself do as much for others later, if he succeed, and he says that his duty now is to accept help, since he cannot do without it.'

'There we have the Swiss, the plebeian,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; 'it is all very right, very right indeed, but where a Frenchman would talk of honour, our Balmat always speaks of duty. Have you not observed it?'

'Yes,' said Edmée, but not as if she concurred heartily in the criticism; 'it seems to me that duty is a grand thing if it can make a man so persevering and patient as Balmat. How I hope he will succeed! How hard he works! I heard him go out at five this morning to his anatomy class.'

'And where were you?'

'At work,' she admitted, laughing. 'I was so afraid that the flowers which Madelon brought me yesterday would fade, that I could hardly sleep for longing for daylight; besides, there were those fans and screens to finish, so that time had to be made.'

'You labour as hard as Balmat himself, my child!'

'It is such happiness! especially when one feels that one is getting on, which he hardly ever does, poor fellow! Just think—he goes several times a week to an anatomy class

from five to eight; he puts a roll in his pocket, and eats it on his way to the Louvre, where he paints all the rest of the morning; then watchmaking—his friend lets him come for half-day's work; of an evening he studies perspective, and all *Décadi* he labours in his corner of the Augustin cloister, and he calls that his holiday!

‘But it is impossible that he should not make progress, unless he has altogether a *passion malheureuse* for painting!’

‘He does, but the effort of imagining a composition is so great that it is always discouraging and depressing to him, and colour always seems to baffle him. David says that he has a really original way of seeing and rendering things, but that his colouring is cold and poor, and it is true, that is the sad part of it! But where can he be?’

‘All the men of the house are absent; Crocq has not come in, I know, for Madelon is, as she would say herself, as ill-tempered as a red ass, and Amat is still absent—so is Michonnet.’

‘There must be some reason for it; what can be happening? And it seems strange not to know at all whether Isnard——’

‘Hush!’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, turning pale, and Edmée stood motionless with terror, as they heard the heavy tramp in the street which generally announced a domiciliary visit. They held their breath; the steps went on; ‘Only the patrol,’ each whispered, and with a simultaneous impulse they clasped each other close. Madelon was heard coming upstairs to say that there was an order from the police that every house should be illuminated.

‘But why? It is a long time since we had such an order. What does it mean?’

‘I know not . . . some nonsense of the Convention. It seems that there is a *tohu bohu* in the city, but I know nothing about it. If you open the window you can hear for yourselves.’

Edmée did so, and a deep sullen hum was audible, above which rose the roll of drums and ominous clang of the tocsin.

‘Heavens! they are beating the *générale*! the tocsin is ringing! how was it we did not hear it sooner?’ exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, in great agitation. ‘What can be happening?’

'Perhaps another massacre in the prisons,' said Madelon, who, being thoroughly out of humour, was inclined to suggest the most gloomy possibilities she could. 'Crocq was talking yesterday,—but I never listen to what he says—and Michonnet too; he declared that Robespierre had been accused of wanting to be king instead of Capet—I daresay it was true, for where there are slaves a tyrant is never long away.'

'Is it—can it be true? If that belief have spread he stands on the edge of his grave!' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, instantly perceiving how tremendous would be the effect of such an accusation.

'I know not,' answered Madelon, with provoking indifference; 'however that may be, it will not bring Crocq home earlier from the *estaminet*, I suppose.'

'But listen, only listen, aunt!' cried Edmée, who had been leaning from the window, regardless of the night air which nearly blew out the candles, set there in obedience to the police orders. 'Hear how the noise is increasing; it is like great waves of sound from every part of the city, and there—there—surely that can be nothing but cannon and ammunition-waggons rolling past the end of the street! Oh, if we could but see!'

'Certainly something very strange is happening,' said Madelon, roused out of her ill-humour; 'none of our men have come in, even Balmat, who is more regular than a clock, and—faces at every window, now, do you see, and before I came up there was a stir but what numbers begin to run down the street! What can it be?'

'What can it be?' repeated Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and the timid voice of their fellow-lodger, Madame Amat, echoed the question, as she came in, with a child in her arms, and two more clinging to her skirts, and all the pale, anxious faces now crowding to every window and door seemed to ask the same question, but the habitual fear in which everyone lived, the caution taught by the times was such that not a single remark was exchanged across the narrow street, and all looked and listened in silence, or said a few words only audible to their own families.

'There is Balmat!' Edmée exclaimed, feeling as if he brought safety with him, but the flickering light of the candles showed his face so pale and agitated that they stood in terror, and only Madelon could ask, 'What is going on in the town? Is there danger?'

'God knows what will happen,' he answered, in a trembling voice; 'have you then heard nothing? do you not know that Robespierre was accused in the Convention to-day? the scene was frightful, they say; he tried to get a hearing; they would not listen; the president rang his bell and shouted for silence every time he began to speak; they howled and roared against him like madmen; Thuriot told him that the blood of Danton was choking him when his voice failed—then Henriot hearing of his danger gallops with the gendarmerie to deliver him; the guard at the Tuileries meet them with their bayonets; then the Commune rise up for Robespierre, arrest the messengers from the Convention, and have twenty-six cannon dragged to the Place de Grève. Robespierre is in the Hôtel de Ville, with his brother, and Coffinhal and Couthon, and I know not whom besides; all his adherents are gathered in the square, over two thousand'—he stopped breathless. The street below now resounded with steps running by, and alternate shouts of 'Vive la Convention!' 'A bas la Convention!' 'Vive la Commune!' from opposing factions, but no one stopped to dispute; the battle was to be fought out elsewhere; all hurried on to the Place de Grève.

'Is it possible!' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, pale with awe. 'All this since this morning, and perhaps before to-morrow this monster may be overthrown!'

'Ah, there is Amat!' cried the wife, whose thoughts had been all the while with her husband, and she ran out to meet him, presently returning for a moment to say, 'Henriot is haranguing the Garde Nationale on the Place du Carousel; if they listen to him all is lost—the Convention must perish,' and then she hurried back, vainly trying to persuade her husband not to go out again.

'Let us go up on the roof; we can see thence all over the Place de Grève,' said Madelon, and they followed, scrambling through a trap-door, to a flat part of the roof, where they clustered, gazing over the city, whose towers and domes rose dark into the sky, though the houses were full of lights, and torches flitted up and down the streets, shedding a yellow, wavering light on the river, on the dark masses of men moving along the quais, and on the serried crowd round the Hôtel de Ville, where cannoniers were standing with lighted matches by their guns, and the gleam of the torches mingled with the cold pale starlight showed bristling pikes and bayonets, and

the desperate and haggard faces of the rabble gathered to defend their chief, while from every quarter of the city the tramp of innumerable feet came near and nearer to the attack. On the Place du Caroussel, Henriot was desperately appealing to the National Guard, only to read in their sullen silence that Robespierre's fate was sealed, and that of his friends with it. From unknown hiding-places, Royalists who had been lurking in daily fear for their lives crept out, and urged on the populace against the Hôtel de Ville, while even more powerful was the stimulus supplied by the tears and supplications of fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, who had relations among the 10,000 prisoners awaiting death in the prisons. With one of those tremendous, inconceivable revulsions which characterise Paris, Robespierre and all belonging to him suddenly became the objects of universal execration; to seize, to destroy, to annihilate him and his party the cry of the throng pouring out to crush the insurgents in the Place de Grève. What would happen next? The first shot, nay, a mere nothing, the opening of a window, the lighting of a torch, and the troops of the Convention and the friends of Robespierre would be at each others' throats, and Paris deluged with blood, perhaps sacked and burned. On every roof where foot could stand spectators were clustering, gazing towards the Place de Grève, in breathless silence, too anxious for words. The heads of the advancing columns were seen debouching on the square; they paused; neither side dared fire the first shot, and a deep, brief silence, more awful and intense than any sound, ensued. It was broken—suddenly, unexpectedly—by a cry of 'Vive la Convention,' from the midst of the insurgent ranks, raised none knew by whom, but the effect was decisive; a roar of applause from the Government troops drowned all token of dissent from the Robespierrists; another silence followed, interrupted this time by a single voice, addressing the insurgents, and audible in the deep hush all over the square. Those on the roofs strained their ears in vain; they could only see that there was a fluctuating, uncertain movement round the Hôtel de Ville, as if friends and foes were mingling, whether peaceably or not none could tell; it was all a dark, surging mass.

'The cannon are not fired,' murmured Edmée.

That was all which they were sure of; the shouts and cries might be those of joy or anger. The hundreds of

anxious eyes bent on the square could see nothing for many minutes but the heaving crowd; after a time it seemed thinner; there were empty spaces here and there, and though the cannon remained, those of the insurgents facing the guns brought up by the Garde Nationale, the gunners had disappeared. Madelon ran downstairs to see if Crocq had returned, and try to hear what was happening; the others stood watching until convinced that they could see nothing which would tell them anything more, and wearied out, they went back to their rooms, but no one in the Maison Crocq, or in hundreds of other houses in Paris, went to bed that night. At day-break Balmat went out, promising to return soon, and Michonnet came in, to find himself instantly surrounded by all the inhabitants of the house, demanding news of the night's events. From him they gathered more or less of the arrest of Robespierre, the terrible scene when the Garde Nationale seized him and his friends in the Hôtel de Ville, and that they were now in the Conciergerie awaiting sentence of death. For a moment no one could speak; then a sort of shriek of mingled joy and fear escaped every lip, embraces, kisses, tears, broken words followed, a scene of confusion, gratitude, almost incredulous rapture, such as was being enacted all over Paris, as if everyone felt his own life and that of his best beloved given back, when beyond hope of reprieve; Paris only recognised the intensity of its terror by the intensity of its relief, but mingled with all was a sort of incredulous amazement that such a thing was possible as that Robespierre could be thus cast down. 'How art thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning!' was the thought in every heart, and each would turn and ask his neighbour if indeed it were true, and shed tears of rapture at the assurance that it was so, that the death-day of the tyrant was come—that tyrant whom their own hands had set up. All Paris was in the streets; from adjacent windows, from roof-tops messages were telegraphed to the prisons, whose inmates had watched in terror all through the evening and night, believing themselves about to be murdered, and now flocked to the windows, scarcely able to believe that it was Robespierre, not themselves, whose last hour had come, reading the altered condition of things in the humbled, downcast air of their gaolers, and in the glad faces which looked at them from without, some of friends, some of strangers, but all gratulatory

alike. Meanwhile Robespierre, mute, impassive, giving no sign of pain either from tortured mind or shattered body, awaited the death which his less stoical companions were trembling to meet. Neither as they passed through the streets, more thronged and by a more exulting crowd than even when Louis Seize went to his death, nor when, last of the condemned, he left the cart for the scaffold, did he show any emotion; once only his eye glanced round, when a man standing near murmured, 'Yes, Robespierre, there is a God!' Physical agony wrung one cry from him as the executioner roughly snatched away the handkerchief which bound the jaw shattered by a brutal shot from a Garde in the Hôtel de Ville, otherwise the stoic Republican died as he had lived, calm, immovable, terrible. And Paris, mad with joy, rushed forth for what was called a 'manifestation promenatoire,' and in the evening thronged to the theatres, to see Armida, with Télémaque for the ballet at the Opera, or the Combat of Thermopylæ in the Cité. So ended the 9th of Thermidor.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LAURE.

'SAY what you will, I cannot understand it,' said Madoiselle de St. Aignan. 'Robespierre is dead, and his friends are dead too, or in hiding—you admit that, and yet power seems only to have passed from one set of assassins to another! Whatever anyone may say, the Revolution was founded on truth and justice; it taught brotherhood and equal rights for all men, it swept away the abuses of centuries, and yet it has come to this! What rivers of blood have been shed, and what crimes committed in the name of Liberty! To be sure, we might say that of Christianity, or anything else with which men have to do, but now we seem to have got the deluge without the ark or the dove! Poor Liberty! she was married to the Revolution in '89, but there was a speedy divorce, for incompatibility *d'humeur*, I suppose. Well, well, go away,

child ; you have your screens and fans to take to Bautain's—do not let me keep you.'

Edmée kissed her and went out, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan sat ruminating an idea which had suddenly occurred to her. Presently she did what she had never attempted since coming to the Maison Crocq—went out of it ; and when Edmée returned she found with great alarm an empty room, and no news of the absentee, except that Madelon said she had heard someone go out, but could not leave the *pieds de mouton à la poulotte* which she was cooking to see who it was. Edmée could do nothing ; Balmat was at the atelier, and she could not possibly seek him among threescore unmannerly students, nor indeed could he have gone in search of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, since no one knew whither she had gone, though an explanation of her absence occurred to Edmée which increased her trepidation ; it might be that she had settled the vexed question whether any communication were to be held with De Pelven by going to see him. In the first boundless relief of Robespierre's death all danger had seemed over, but Balmat, looking on with the dispassionate clear-sightedness of a foreigner, unconcerned with what was happening, thought otherwise, and the event proved him right ; the Jacobins were as dangerous as ever, and though they released those who were in prison on the 9th of Thermidor, they replaced them with others, and when the tide of oppression and bloodshed seemed retreating a great wave would sweep up over the whole shore, and carry everything away with it. The confusion in the country was greater than ever, and it was increased by Royalist plots, and the vengeance, stealthy in Paris, open in the east of France, which they were taking on their enemies. Strange rumours began to spread of a secret society formed among them under the name of the *Compagnons de Jéhu*, bound to put to death every Jacobin who fell into their hands, and diligences were constantly stopped and robbed by men whose air and dress showed them to be of the upper classes. Edmée could not guess how all this would affect De Pelven, but she knew that to come again into contact with him could bring nothing but trouble and peril. She waited in increasing anxiety, until her fears were partially dispelled by hearing Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's step. She came in, looking tired, excited, half amused, accompanied by Isnard, who bowed to Edmée, saying, 'We

have not met since the fall of the monster. I have been occupied in composing his epitaph :—

Passant, ne pleure pas son sort,
Car s'il vivait tu serais mort.

Do you approve ?'

'Ah, monsieur, how I thank you for having brought home my dear aunt safely !' cried Edmée, too glad to see Mademoiselle de St. Aignan safe to attend to what he said. 'Where have you been ?'

'On a little business of my own, *ma charmante*,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, smiling to see how strongly Isnard's vanity was piqued by the neglect which his wit met with. He stood gloomy, like a sulky child. 'After you went I had nothing special to do, so I bethought myself of visiting my cousin.'

'Dear aunt ! how could you ? And you have seen him ?'

'No, he has quitted Paris.'

'Quitted Paris ! Are you sure ?'

'So his *propriétaire* says. His apartment is to let ; he has gone to Poitou, where his family live, or did live.'

'The Robespierrists are tasting what they made others taste so long,' said Isnard, suddenly and savagely.

'*Cher monsieur*, you are mistaken if you think De Pelven was an adherent of Robespierre ; he was nothing of the kind, and I, who know the man, answer for it. Robespierre was never widely popular, as Mirabeau was for instance, but his adherents were all fanatics, and that gave them enormous strength. De Pelven was no fanatic ; it was not in him. If he did good or did evil it was coldly, and without loving it.'

'Anyhow he and I have a long account to settle ; he will yet repent that he ever heard my name,' said Isnard, in the same tragical, gloomy manner, at which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan shrugged her shoulders.

'But what did you do, aunt ? where did you go ?'

'I walked a little way—yes, I actually did !' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, triumphant in her own daring. 'Presently I saw a fiacre, and hired it, but I had not driven half a mile when I confess I wished myself at home, for some forty or fifty viragoes rushed upon it—it seems that the driver had the misfortune to be husband to one of these *mégères*—ordering him to stop and take as many of them as

it would hold to the Convention. I assure you it was not agreeable to be surrounded by furies howling and shouting for bread and the Constitution of '93. I fully expected to see our Lafarge among them, and then Heaven knows what would have happened. There was nothing for it but to get out; luckily they paid no attention to me, and I was not far from De Pelven's old residence, and there stood monsieur in conversation with the *concierge*; it seems he had business with De Pelven.'

She looked with curiosity at Isnard, but he volunteered no explanation beyond repeating, 'Yes, I told you we two had an account to settle!'

'Then you escorted my aunt back here, monsieur? Ah, dear aunt, you have made me terribly anxious!'

'You see, *ma bonne*,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, half apologetically, 'I wanted to ask De Pelven if there be any hope of recovering my poor little estate at Mortemart; monsieur here says no, I am sorry to say; it must have been confiscated as *bien d'émigré*, which seems hard, I must say; and then again it is only through De Pelven that I see any means of communicating with my nephew. He might get the chevalier's name *rayé*, so that he might return. If you hear of M. de Pelven's being in Paris, you will not fail to let me know, monsieur?'

'I will not fail,' answered Isnard, with a jarring laugh, which made Mademoiselle de St. Aignan draw herself up, displeased.

'And you, monsieur? you are no longer in danger? we have frequently wondered what had become of you,' said Edmée, and then she added in a lower tone,—'And Laure?—I have thought of her so often!'

She stopped, frightened by the way in which he turned upon her.

'You do not mean that you have not heard?' he cried, angrily, as if unable to credit her ignorance of what was so important to himself.

'I know nothing, indeed,' faltered Edmée.

'She is dead. You need not ask how. They could not find me; they took her, and they shall pay for it. Every drop of her blood, every hair of her head, shall be paid for!' And then, throwing himself on a chair, and covering his face, he sobbed aloud. No one ever appreciated me as she did!

she knew what I was! There was nothing she would not have sacrificed for my sake!’

Edmée stood silent, sorrowing for the pretty girl whom she had seen so short a time, yet could not forget, but her sympathy with Isnard was chilled by a sense of something unreal and egotistical in his emotion.

‘Had she any relations, the poor child?’ asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

‘Yes—a mother,’ he answered, as if importuned by an idle and irrelevant question.

‘Poor mother—you have no doubt seen her?’

‘No—on the contrary. It would only make me suffer more cruelly, and she was mine, mine—even her mother could not enter into my feelings.’ Tears were streaming between his fingers. Presently he raised his head and said, ‘I was very true to her. Of course I was often tempted to be unfaithful, but I was always loyal to the poor child. It could not have continued, but it was very beautiful as long as it lasted, and now it will ever remain a lovely recollection. I shall never have the pain of finding that my feelings are changing. A time must have come when she no longer satisfied me—it would have been very painful to us both; we are spared that anguish. I comfort myself thus.’

To Mademoiselle de St. Aignan it seemed a reasonable and sensible mode of argument, and she chimed in with it, and he took Edmée’s speechless indignation for sympathy which could find no words. ‘Ah, you feel for me; you understand me!’ he said, as he took leave, kissing the hand which she could hardly force herself to yield to him. ‘You will hear some day how I repaid the debt which I owe her murderer!’

‘That young man is a strange medley,’ Mademoiselle de St. Aignan remarked, when he was gone. ‘His sorrow is all for himself, though it is real in its way, and his vanity is so strong that it almost reconciles him to his sorrow, so long as he can believe that it makes him the central figure in the picture. Apparently it never occurs to him that he caused that poor thing’s death by hiding himself as he did, and leaving her to meet the danger. But he is dangerous—I told you so before; he will pique himself on exacting vengeance for her, and the *éclat* of it will have an irresistible charm for him. I wonder whom he means to call to account!’

Edmée had divined that De Pelven was the man, and sus-

pected that he knew Isnard was lying in wait for him, and had left Paris as much on that account as because the friends of Robespierre were in danger, though she little guessed that he had betaken himself to Mortemart, while giving out that he had gone to Poitou, and was quietly living in Made-moiselle de St. Aignan's house, partly as an unsuspected refuge, and partly with a hope that he might there learn something about her movements, as he probably would but for Isnard's authoritative assertion that the property must have been sold. Edmée did not care to say even what she believed to be the fact, and only replied, 'It must have seemed very cruel to name Laure as I did!'

'Bah! how should you know, *petite*? though to be sure one may safely suppose that all one's acquaintance have gone out of the world now-a-days, but only his enormous and preposterous vanity could have imagined that of course all concerning himself must have needs reached our ears. I wonder who he is atrocious manners, but he is *né*, one sees that Isnard?—Isnard?—'

'Balmat says he is in some way connected with the De Monfort family.'

'What! is it possible? I know all about them; a family proud as Lucifer; they lived not far from some of my mother's relations, in an old château like a fortress, lost among the woods, and were as fierce and savage as the wild boars in their forests. A father, three sons, and a daughter. They never stirred off their own lands, and had a flavour of the middle ages about them. I recollect something told us once by some visitor to our château—the young men suspected that the sister, a girl who had never had any education or seen any gentleman but her father and brothers, had a penchant for a handsome garde-chasse. They asked no questions; they did not shoot him, for that is an aristocrat sort of death, but they fell on the man and beat him to death with their guns.'

'Horrible! And she?'

'Oh, sent off to some convent, and there was an end of the matter. It was on their own lands, and nobody's affair. The Baron de la Roche, who related the story to my father, merely observed, "Ces gens vivent de nous; qu'importe s'ils meurent par nous!" I do not exactly see however how this Isnard can belong to the De Monforts. To be sure there are many ways

of belonging to a noble family, and if there be a hitch anywhere it would explain his being such a violent aristocrat. He certainly has just their vanity; they believed that the world was created for them, and that everything they did was remarkable; you often see it in people who live a solitary life, and never get out of sight of themselves; I suppose he has inherited the feeling, and some of their ferocity too. How his eyes glared as he spoke of vengeance: did you observe it?’

‘Yes, but what a poor-spirited creature he is! How can anyone call such a feeling as he described love?’ said Edmée, colouring vividly with indignation.

‘Love! what do you know about the matter, *ma charmante*?’ asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, quickly.

‘I suppose that one may divine a little,’ said Edmée, colouring more and more, well aware that she had touched on a subject about which a well brought up maiden was supposed to be utterly ignorant.

‘Well . . . after all, one cannot treat you as a mere child,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, in an odd, puzzled, uncertain tone. ‘As for me, I am a *vieille fille*, I can almost consider myself a married woman. So it is not thus that you would wish to be loved, *ch, petite*?’

And she became silent, perhaps recalling past days when she too, in spite of the severely innocent education of a girl, *bien élevée*, had had her dreams, and waited for the return of one betrothed who never came back to her. It had not broken her heart in youth, nor saddened her middle age, but she had never forgotten that spring-time of youth and hope, and it had left a tinge of romance that she would greatly have liked to see renewed in Edmée’s history. She betrayed the course which her thoughts had taken, by saying, ‘It seems that the laws against the clergy and the *émigrés* are as severe as ever. All the self-devotion which the priests have shown will not save their character in the popular eyes, and as for the *émigrés*, if they could come back what would become of those who had seized their lands? The Revolution has altered all the laws of property: Long before ’89 the peasant loved a bit of land better than his life, and he will never let go any that he has once grasped. No, I do not see how the *émigrés* are to return. And when they do, they will be unaware of the current in which the Revolution has set, and bent only on revenge—it must be so!’

Edmée had seldom seen so weary and depressed a look on Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's face. She seemed to have had a new view of public affairs, which her good sense forced her to accept against her will.

'That young man,' she continued presently, 'that Isnard, he is a type of the Royalists who ruined our cause. What does he care for truth, or liberty or patriotism? No more than a peasant! He is a Royalist because it is the aristocratic side, and because without a king there can be no *noblesse*, and he thinks that noble birth gives him the right to commit all the seven deadly sins without being called to account. To a man like that the lower classes do not exist. When I hear him talk I understand what we seem to the people, and why they have no pity. It is not this or that individual whom they want to destroy, but our order.'

'I suppose so,' said Edmée reluctantly.

'See, child, many of these democrats are true patriots, but short-winded. They are mostly in terrible earnest, and our class has lost the power of being in earnest. These are evil days. I am strangely tired, perhaps that is why I see things look so black. But now tell me what you have been about. Another batch of fans, I see.'

'Yes, and a proposal to paint little boxes for *bon-bons*, with any designs I like, and they will be printed off. I shall be well paid, and can gain much thus, I think. And oh, dear aunt, I have made a discovery, I am sure of it. Next door to Bautain's is a picture dealer's; I thought I would see if they would buy one of my flower pieces. It was presumptuous, but they did. The master of the shop, M. Pinard, praised it. But that is not the best. I saw there a flower painting so perfect that I could only feel ashamed to have offered mine. M. Pinard saw me studying it, and smiled, saying I could not choose a better model; it was by a flower painter whose works are paid for enormously; all the more that he would hardly be induced to part with them, but touched and retouched until his patrons tore them from him. There seemed to me something familiar in the handling, and looking close, imagine what I saw—instead of a name in one corner was a very minute lily.'

'The royal flower! what audacity!'

'Ah, but do you know what it told me? The name of the artist. "The painter of that picture is called Delys," I said.

"No," said Pinard, "he is an old artist who has rooms in the Louvre; he is called Lafleur." And then I saw it all! It is M. Delys who used to go to St. Aignan, whom I used to watch at work! who gave me my first colours. he must have assumed the name of Lafleur. It is he of whom Balmat speaks, who allows no one to enter his studio. But I shall find my way thither, and astonish our Balmat; be sure you tell him nothing. But I tire you, dear aunt?' she added, disappointed at the want of interest with which her eager tale seemed heard.

'No, no, *petite*, on the contrary I do not know what has happened to me. These ten days I seem to have grown more dull and tired. It is nothing. My expedition of to-day over-tired me.'

Edmée looked uneasily at her. It was very unhealthy weather, and an epidemic of low fever was prevalent, greatly increased by want of proper food and the general anxious and nervous state of the public, but Mademoiselle de St. Aignan shook off her depression, and began discussing Edmée's news with her usual animation. Edmée was delighted by the discovery which she thought that she had made. She had long resolved to storm the fortress which Balmat declared impregnable, and now she had no longer any fears of failure, though M. Delys seemed to exaggerate the common habit of many artists of surrounding their labours with a kind of mystery. He could indeed hardly be expected to recollect the child who had formed but a very passing episode in his life, though he had so powerfully influenced hers; but Edmée felt sure she should at least once see the inside of his atelier, and fell asleep full of schemes for the morrow.

They were not destined to be fulfilled. Morning found Mademoiselle de St. Aignan so unwell that Edmée could not leave her; and it proved the beginning of a tedious illness, lasting week after week with little perceptible change. 'I will never set my heart on anything again,' Edmée thought, with the feeling that it is sufficient to desire a thing strongly to see it become impossible, which readily occurs to natures pitched in a minor key; but soon she could only think of her invalid. Those were weary months, full of the difficulties of constant attendance on a sick bed, when combined with the pitiless necessity of gaining a livelihood. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's cheerful spirit never failed; she was the most

patient and good-humoured of invalids, though in health her temper could be quick enough ; but Edmée's strength was sorely tried by anxious days, with work done in moments snatched from the sick room, and watchful nights. Madame Amat gave what help she could, and Balmat tidied her over many hard hours ; Madelon too was ready to assist as far as she knew how, but she had the peasant rough-handedness and inability to cook or nurse. Her favourite remedy was hot wine with a candle melted in it, and she was mortally affronted at its being utterly declined by both nurse and patient, and then she could not pardon Edmée's wasting money on a doctor, and having once or twice to beg her to wait for the rent in consequence. ' If it had been someone who could have said a prayer over *la malade*, there would have been some sense in it,' she said, a prayer being a euphuism for a charm, ' but a doctor ! If we were sure she would get well there would be some sense in paying for medicine, but if she should die after all it will all have been wasted ! ' It seemed more than once during that winter as if, from Madelon's point of view, all the nursing and doctoring would be wasted. Death stood on the threshold of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's room, and even seemed to enter and stand by her bed ; but with the new year came a turn for the better, reviving hopes, increasing strength, and Edmée began at once to realise how tired and how glad she was. ' You would not let me go, my child ; you have kept me, and I am right glad to have been kept,' Mademoiselle de St. Aignan said to her, when she first left her bed for an arm-chair, helped by Madelon's strong arm, very readily proffered, ' but how have you got through this time ? '

Edmée could not have told her. She had got through it as people do, whose strength and nerves are taxed to their utmost, without realising the strain until it slackens. She found her chief difficulty would now be in putting aside the anxiety of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan about the white looks which she could not disguise, and to hide that their purse had grown so empty that, weary or not, she must work doubly hard to re-fill it. It was Mademoiselle de St. Aignan who recurred to the project discussed before her illness, and urged her to seek M. Delys, and after all it was rather to please her than herself, that Edmée promised to do so. Madelon shook her head, and did Mademoiselle de St. Aignan no good by

her comments on Edmée's looks, uttered with the unsparing plain-spokenness of her class, and Edmée was obliged to silence her by admitting that she did want air and rest, and promising to seek the old painter the first day that she could leave Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OPEN SESAME.

THE Louvre in 1795 was more like an Augean stable than what it became a few years later, when the strong hand of Napoleon had cleared it, though even he found it a difficult task. Some attempt had been made by the Convention to establish a national museum there, the chief result of which had been wasting large sums of money. Great part of the palace was given up to artists, who had constructed a series of ateliers and chambers in the great unceiled galleries, lighted only from the court, and established there, not only their studios, but their families. Anything more disorderly, gloomy and comfortless than the Louvre and the Tuileries at this time it would be difficult to imagine, but no one appeared to think so, and a lodging in the former was greatly coveted, especially as it was given gratis. Here David had his atelier, and that of his students; here Van Spaendonck composed his beautiful flower pieces, Valenciennes painted his landscapes, and Ingres began to study art. Even in 1792 there had been an exhibition of pictures, and all through these troubled years art had struggled on, and in some degree shared in the new birth of all things in France, partaking of the faults and mistakes of the times, but shaking off traditional chains, and animated with fresh vigour. Through this stormy time M. Delys had worked unmolested, almost unconscious of the tempest raging outside of his atelier, absorbed in his delightful art, and content to produce slowly, so long as the result satisfied him. Sometimes he disappeared for days together, having left Paris to spend a week in the woods and fields, studying plants and flowers in their own haunts; sometimes

he procured subjects from the flower market, where he was a well-known customer. As Edmée crossed the Place du Louvre, so early that the milk-women, with great jars on their heads, were still crying 'La laitière ! la laitière ! allons vite !' and the sky was still pearly with the first dawn, she saw the old man, a solitary figure, coming in a contrary direction over the silent square, and carefully cherishing a tuft of early primroses and moss, through which a spray of ivy was twining. She recognised him at once by his air and peculiar gait, and the brown coat with gold buttons, and great pockets, stuffed full of plants, just as she had formerly seen him at St. Aignan's. How familiar it all seemed—the muslin ruffles, and the shirt-frill stained with snuff, and the round wig, pushed awry as of old. Her heart beat so fast with pleasure and trepidation, that her first low call was unheard, but the second time that she uttered his name he turned sharply. 'Who calls me so ? Who are you, child ? What do you want ?' he asked irritably, and pushing his wig more crooked than ever.

'My name is Lafleur—Lafleur, do you hear ? I do not know you.'

'You do not recollect me, monsieur, but I have seen you formerly, at St. Aignan.'

'But what do you want ? what do you want ? I have no time to lose,' he answered, offering her a few sous, much as he would have brushed away a troublesome fly.

'Not that, monsieur, something much greater,' replied Edmée with a half-laugh, and then he began to perceive that he had not a beggar to do with, and called his thoughts away with an effort from the primroses which he was contemplating as he went along, regardless of the worn and dangerous state of the pavement, or the risk of walking into the deep gutters in the middle of the streets.

'I used to see you paint at the château. You taught me a little, and gave me some colours. Madame de St. Aignan was my godmother.'

'I cannot recollect anything about you,' said the old man, peevishly ; 'what is your name ?'

'Edmée. Do you not recollect painting a branch of a new tree which Madame de St. Aignan had planted in the gardens ? a tree with drooping yellow blossoms, a little like boats or butterflies ? You said there was but one other place where they were found in all France.'

‘The laburnum . . . I begin to recollect,’ said M. Delys, more gently. The Countess sent you to show me where they grew, saying, you knew every flower and tree in the grounds. Yes, it comes back to me. Does it still flourish?’

‘I think so, monsieur. Trees and even flowers live longer than those who planted them.’

‘True, true. Her god-daughter . . . to be sure; but you were a mere child,’ said M. Delys, with evident suspicion of her identity.

‘It is several years ago, monsieur.’

‘Ah, true; one forgets, one forgets. Long enough to lay the Countess in her grave, and for many other things to happen—at least, so they tell me, but I never listen, I never listen,’ he added, hurriedly; ‘I know and care nothing of what passes beyond my atelier. The primroses blow still at all events, and very early too this year. Here am I letting you waste my time while my flowers fade.’

He walked hastily on, but Edmée kept by his side, and apparently his mind was occupied by the recollections which she had evoked, for he said suddenly, ‘Are you not the steward’s daughter? What has become of him? Dead, no doubt, like the rest. And what are you doing in Paris? You are not alone, I suppose?’

‘No, I have an aunt with me.’

‘Edmée?—And a sweet voice,’ he muttered audibly. ‘Strange that she should have that name. What is your surname, child?’

‘My father was called Leroux.’

‘Well then, mademoiselle . . . tush! citoyenne Leroux—’

‘Pardon!’ she interrupted, turning red and pale, ‘Madame Alain.’

‘What! You are married! impossible!’ said the painter, surveying the slender, girlish figure with unconcealed surprise.

‘I am older than I look, monsieur.’

‘And how long have you been married?’

‘It was in ’93.’

‘And your husband? where is he?’

‘I do not know what has become of him,’ she stammered, casting down her eyes. ‘He was obliged to leave me directly . . . I have never seen him since.’

‘Bon! what times!’ muttered the old man. ‘All is

upside down. No doubt the husband was carried off to the war, artisan or peasant he would have to go, and there are the owners of St. Aignan all gone too, who knows where! Nobles and peasants all vanished equally good heavens, what times! She does not look like a peasant, this child she is far more like a noble demoiselle Well, why have you sought me? how did you find out anything about me?’

‘I saw one of your beautiful paintings at Pinard’s, where I had gone to ask if he would buy some daub of mine; I knew your touch, and then I saw the lily which you always put in the corner—’

‘Think of that! she recognised my touch!’ cried M. Delys, delighted; ‘Go on, *ma bonne*.’

‘They assured me that the painting was by an artist named Lafleur, but I knew better, and found out where you lived. You are thinking me very daring, but you know I am a sort of pupil of yours,’ said Edmée; ‘so here I am to ask a favour, a great favour.’

‘And what?’ asked M. Delys, struck with the charm which her momentary smile had given to her delicate, mournful countenance.

‘Ah, if you would let me study in your atelier!’

‘*Peste!*’ he exclaimed, much astonished. ‘Study in my atelier! you are out of your senses, child.’

‘Oh, I know that you admit no one, and have no pupils, but I am not a wicked boy, but industrious and well-behaved; I would light your fire and arrange your atelier—’

‘Apelles forbid! No one but poor Balmat shall do that an excellent Swiss, a good awkward fellow, who has made his way in, I know not how, and I have not the heart to forbid it.’

Edmée laughed a little, knowing it was for her sake that Balmat had patiently ingratiated himself with the old man, and brought away many useful hints and criticisms for her.

‘Anyhow I must learn to paint better than I do now,’ she said, ‘and you must help me.’

‘Why, she begins to order now!’ said the old man, but he smiled. ‘If she were but to call me “father” I should begin to think that my daughter I always felt that she would have inherited my talent, and perhaps even have de-

veloped it further. Ah, bah! the whole morning will be gone—do you think these things are settled in the streets? Stay, you shall see my atelier; there can be no harm in that,’ he murmured as if apologising to himself for some weakness. ‘When she has heard my neighbours for ten minutes it will put such foolish fancies out of her head. Edmée! why should she have precisely that name, I ask you?’

Edmée followed him up a narrow dark staircase leading from the little door by which they entered the Louvre to a studio which he had inherited from someone who had quitted it so suddenly for the wars or the scaffold that he had left most of his possessions behind. M. Delys had left them undisturbed. It was a far larger atelier than he needed, with bare grey walls, and a single window, some ten feet from the ground, and it had evidently belonged to a painter of David’s school, for bronzes, a curule chair, and Etruscan vases were mingled with plaster casts of heads and legs and arms. There was a sketch of some classic subject half-designed on an easel, pushed aside and forgotten behind a stove. On another easel, under the great window, so that the full sunlight fell on it, stood a lovely group of flowers which Van Spaedonck himself might have envied. The primroses just brought in were to form part of it. He laid them down with loving care; his thin fingers seemed to caress them as he sprinkled them with water, while his companion surveyed all around with keen interest. She felt as if she had found her way into a new land, where everything was a revelation or a wonder, but her eye fell on the painting half finished under the window, and she uttered a cry of delight.

‘Ah! *mon maître*, what a *chef d’œuvre*!’ she cried, with the sincerest admiration. ‘One sees the drops of rain glitter on those leaves! that butterfly is just going to settle! And how was it possible to find a blue so exactly the right shade for this flower?’

‘*Hon!* she thinks herself a critic!’ said the painter, laughing, but evidently well pleased by her enthusiastic delight. ‘Do not speak to me of butterflies; that one was the cause of my dismissing the only pupil whom I ever admitted here. He had talent, enormous talent, I own it, but I always doubted if he had that deep and timid love of Nature without which no one is ever permitted to enter her sanctuary. I suspected that he dulled his perceptions and blinded his eyes

by pursuing art to gain money or fame—that he was no true worshipper, in short, for art is a priesthood, child, remember that, and we are at once priests and worshippers, or else pagans and exiles from her temple. Last *Décadi* he goes as he says to study landscape. I approve, but the next day he returns, enters here with a butterfly pinned to his hat alive and fluttering. I see this, I rise—’ M. Delys grew so excited by the mere recollection of the scene that he rose as he spoke with a threatening gesture, ‘I exclaim, “Begone, unfeeling animal, heartless wretch; go and become a butcher’s apprentice, but abandon for ever the thought of becoming a priest of Nature, since you treat thus one of her most exquisite works!” He went, or I should have thrown him down the stairs. I must have snatched his hat from him, for I found it on the floor afterwards, and I drew the poor fly as you see, but talk to me of pupils after that!’

‘But I assure you, monsieur, I shall never come with a butterfly pinned to my hat,’ said Edmée. He turned sharply towards her.

‘Upon my word, if I thought you were laughing at me—’ he began, but his face relaxed as he met her smile, and he seemed studying her intently. ‘Child, you look as if you had suffered much!’ he said abruptly.

‘Alas! is there anyone in France who has not suffered in these last years? You yourself, dear master, have you not been obliged to change your name?’

‘True; it was discovered to be too aristocratic; I was arrested on the strength of it, for the *De* is forbidden, and the *lys* a royal flower. Thanks to someone for whom I was executing a commission at the time I escaped, but I thought it best to get rid of a name which suited the times so ill.’

‘Yet you still sign your paintings with a lily?’

‘No one notices it, and it is a little trick which it consoles me to play the good people who govern us; but hush! this is a matter of life and death; I forget in my atelier how things are going outside—but do you know, child, that the great David himself has lately narrowly escaped the guillotine?’

‘To which he had sent his king. It was too good for him!’ cried the girl.

‘What are you saying, foolish child? An artist like David is worth more than any crowned head!’ said M. Delys,

for a moment forgetting the royalist in the painter. 'And yet but these are not things to speak of. Ah, you start—you hear a noise below, eh?'

'What an uproar!' said Edmée, reassured by his tranquillity.

'Ah ha! The pupils of David; they are below me. Without doubt they are choosing a position for the model and cannot agree on it. Listen, *ma petite*, if you came here to me you would meet them all, and you are young, you know, and they might play you tricks,

Ils vous font des caresses,
Des petits compliments!

he concluded, humming a couplet of an old song.

'Perhaps, but I think not. I have had for some time to earn my living as I could; I have had to go at all hours among all kinds of people, but nothing ever happened to me. I think when people see someone who only thinks of her work they let her go her way. And besides you would say a little word about me to these gentlemen, would you not?' she added coaxingly.

'I might. We shall see. Where do you live? Good, I will see your aunt this evening.'

'But, monsieur, the matter only concerns myself, that is needless,' said Edmée, visibly disconcerted and embarrassed. 'My aunt might not like it. She receives no visits.'

'*Ta, ta*;' said M. Delys, not a little surprised at what seemed to him strange pretension. 'Visits! I want to see her on business, and examine with my own eyes what your capabilities are. You have drawings?—sketches? Of course I must see her; you are much too young to settle matters for yourself.'

'But, monsieur—'

'Have you deceived me?' he asked, suspiciously. 'I begin to think that there is neither aunt nor husband in the case, and that—'

'Enough, monsieur, we shall expect you this evening. Only,' added Edmée, her tone of pride changing to supplication, 'you promise not to speak of us to anyone? No doubt we may seem too humble to have enemies, but—'

'Is there anyone so happy now?' asked the old man, brusquely. 'We shall see, we shall see. Let me work, my

flowers want me.' He seized his palette. Edmée stood unnoticed, watching the tints grow on the canvas, following each touch with such fascinated interest that she forgot the anxiety which had suddenly clouded her face. He remained silently occupied, until a tap at the door of the atelier was followed by the entrance of Balmat, and did not look round so as to surprise the gay and mischievous pantomime with which Edmée responded to Balmat's speechless astonishment, but called out, 'Here, Balmat, what do you think of that little lass wanting to be a pupil of mine! What do you say to that?'

'I think if you do take her, citoyen, you will never want a model for a lily,' said Balmat, looking at the young girl, who with her small head set on a slender white neck, and long eyelashes, shadowing downcast eyes, did indeed suggest the idea of a statue of Purity.

'*T'ope là!* I accept her on the strength of the comparison,' said M. Delys, delighted with this shadowy pretext for doing what he had already secretly resolved on. 'Do not let anyone suppose it is a good action; I hate good actions, I never do them, as you know, but if anyone resemble a flower, he or she possesses the qualities of that plant; I have long noticed it. So that is settled, and I must see what I can make of her.'

'We shall call this the Atelier du Lys henceforward,' said Balmat, who was perfectly aware, like everyone else, of the old painter's real name, and liked to torment him by allusions to it, which caused him to buzz angrily, like an irritated wasp, since it was one of his many fancies to choose to believe it entirely disguised and unknown.

'Get away to your easel unless you have something better to do with your time here than talk folly,' he answered, 'though for that matter you waste it there just as much,' and Balmat made a friendly sign to Edmée, and went away, but he looked suddenly downcast, and M. Delys muttered remorsefully, 'There I have spoiled his day's work for him, poor fellow! Just like me! I shall make nothing of mine either after this; what business has a crabbed old man to paint flowers?'

'Do you think he will ever succeed?' asked Edmée, with a strong conviction that the 'crabbedness' was either a delusion, or all on the outside.

‘How should I know? his fingers seem dumb and lame when he handles a brush, yet there seems much promise . . . He’s a good fellow, and takes the tricks of his fellow-students in the best part, though I once saw him overwhelmed with despair after they had invited him to breakfast, which they explained to him at the end was paid for by the sale of his watch.’

‘They had taken it! How shameful! Did he value it so much?’

‘Ah bah, they are young, and it only came to him from some aunt or grandmother.’

‘Did he ever get it back?’

‘I believe so,’ answered M. Delys, very shortly, afraid that after all he might have to confess to a good action, since he himself had redeemed the watch, and no one ever dreaded a bad action being brought home to him more than he did a good one, since it much interfered with the character of cynic which he chose to play—indifferently enough at the best.—Edmée guessed the truth, laughed in secret, and asked no more.

‘Ah,’ he broke out again a few minutes later, contemplating his work, ‘how wisely Chardin used to speak when he heard us criticising the paintings in the salon: “Gently, judge gently,” he would say, “find the worst picture here, and then recollect that perhaps two thousand poor fellows have broken their brush to pieces despairing even to do as ill as that!” not better, mind you, but even as badly. He always declared that there was no education so laborious as that of a painter. You begin to draw at seven years old, and years later you are able to attempt the live model, and then it seems as if you had all to begin over again!’

He became absorbed once more in his work, and scarcely noticed Edmée, when, at length aware of the lapse of time, she hastily bade him farewell. As she went down the little winding staircase the troubled look returned to her face. She slackened her pace, and stood still at the bottom, thinking. There was now absolute silence in the atelier where David’s pupils were working, for unable to agree on the pose to be given to the model, a deputation had sought him to request that he would come and decide the question, and everyone was now listening with deep attention to his remarks. The silence did not last long; a door opened and he came out;

his black eyes rested on Edmée with a look of surprise, for a young girl alone in the Louvre was an unusual apparition. Her eyes fell before his, with a feeling of repulsion, such as had thrilled through her, when she saw him during the Fête of the Être Suprême. 'I wonder if Madame Chalgrin's ghost haunts him!' she murmured, recollecting the inexplicable and criminal forgetfulness with which David, urged at last into obtaining a pardon for the sister of Vernet, whom he had loved in vain and could not forgive, kept it through careless forgetfulness a day or two, and learned when at last he sent it to her family that she had already perished. Scarcely was he out of sight when a long howl echoed through the atelier, uttered by a pupil who had been watching through a peep-hole in the door until a fresh uproar might decently recommence. M. Delys, overhead, smiled, and said to himself, 'David is gone;' Edmée started and hurried away. She could not imagine how this band, as undisciplined as that which later assembled in the studio of Horace Vernet, could study to any purpose, and would have been greatly surprised had she seen how steadily many were colouring and drawing, in the midst of noise, jests, and pranks of all kinds, but she was too anxious to think of anything but her own affairs as she returned to the Maison Crocq, through streets now fast filling with the usual busy and idle crowd which each day called into them, and ringing with the discordant voices of orange-sellers, calling 'Portugal! Portugal!' fishermen shouting 'Des harengs qui glacent!' or 'Le maquereau n'est pas mort!' vendors of brooms, baked apples, vinegar, ink, and milk, who elbowed their way among the crowd, and mingled their shrill cries with those of a hundred other ambulatory merchants. Edmée had learned the true Parisian art of slipping readily through all the obstacles which foot-passengers had to encounter, and reached the Maison Crocq long before she had settled the difficulty which was perplexing her. Notwithstanding the precocious experience which responsibility and anxiety and thought for herself and others had given her, she was still in some respects a child. She had not foreseen in the least that her request to M. Delys to receive her as a pupil would involve his becoming acquainted with her personal concerns, or meeting Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

CHAPTER XXIX.

‘SHOULD OLD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT.’

It was never willingly that M. Delys troubled himself about anything outside the walls of his atelier, where he usually succeeded in forgetting the events which were convulsing all France. He shrank from coming in contact with them, and itred to avoid knowing what he was powerless to prevent, feeling the keen and irritable annoyance of a nervous and sensitive man when forced to do so, deluded himself into the belief that he was a philosopher and a misanthrope, and assured his friends in perfect good faith that he was a new Timon. Their amused incredulity vexed him beyond measure, and his ingenuity was sorely taxed to explain away the numerous kind actions which he found himself constantly performing. The visit of Edmée had awakened thoughts which had slumbered for years, and as he worked at his primroses he was recalling the pleasant days spent formerly at Château St. Aignan, where the host, though far from loving art as his wife did, had some knowledge of the subject, had travelled in Italy, and, well aware of the deplorable condition of painting in France could talk agreeably of its state in Holland, and even knew a little of the new-born English school. It was his *métier* to be a connoisseur and patron, in a pleasant patrician way, and M. Delys had willingly accepted an invitation to spend a week occasionally at the château, and paint the rare flowers in the hothouses. It all came back to him now. ‘What changes!’ he was thinking; ‘who could have dreamed of them? Yes, it was well she died, and yet I can never imagine her dead—so gracious, so charming; she used to stand by me in that cashmere shawl looking at my painting, and always with something to say about it which sounded sweet from her lips.

Yes, I can see her now, leaning on her son’s arm, or looking at him—ah, it is only mothers who have the secret of such looks—or else she had her little god-daughter by the hand, that little Edmée, her namesake, no doubt—it was for her sake I chose that name for my daughter, though I knew then as well as I do now no child of mine would ever bear it. A daughter . . . if I had had one like Tintoretto, who loved her art,

but loved her father better still, and would not be tempted away from him even by crowned heads. Strange that that little Edmée should find me out here; I remember now that the Countess said she had a real taste for painting. What flowers there were in those hothouses! they were the Countess's passion, and doubtless they are dead or neglected. Accursed revolution! but there becoming aware that he had uttered this unpatriotic sentiment aloud, he glanced round in alarm. Only the bare walls had heard him, and with a sigh of relief he resumed his painting, which he only interrupted a few hours later, while he ate a very simple dinner, which he took from a cupboard in one corner of the room. Balmat looked in once or twice, and silently attended to the stove, but did not speak, though curious to know how Edmée had made her way in. Daylight began to fade, and the unwelcome moment approached when it was no longer possible to continue painting—always unwelcome, always delayed as long as possible. For fifty years he had spent day after day thus, with unwearied and increasing delight in his art.

'It is not bad—not at all bad,' he said at last, half aloud, as he rose and stood a little way from his easel, to contemplate the group of flowers upon it. 'I have fairly caught the colour of that half-opened rose; one should never forget that a rose, strictly speaking, has no shadows, only deepened lights. But the bud never shall I catch the modest air, full of promise and virginal mystery, of a rosebud. There is some secret in it which I shall never divine. What does a man know of an innocent young girl? and flower-buds and girls are closely related. Ah, that child. I must go and find her. Poor little lily, she looks as if she had grown up in the shade,' murmured the old man, whose thoughts ran so much on flowers in his solitary life that sometimes he seemed to confuse them with human beings, or, on the other hand, reversed the case, and looked on human beings as plants. One of his favourite theories was that each individual had a counterpart in the vegetable kingdom, and he esteemed his acquaintance according to the plant or blossom which they reminded him of. After all he was less often mistaken than might have been expected, though his prejudices once formed, were ineradicable.

'I am stiff; I want exercise, I may as well walk that way as any other,' he observed, apologising to himself, and thinking aloud as usual. 'What a pretty voice that child had—a voice

like a *fauvette*. By-the-by,' added he, with *naïf* astonishment, 'I never asked for any proof that she can paint—old rattle-pate that I am! just like me! and I have almost promised to take her for a pupil without knowing whether she can tell the right end of a brush from the wrong one! What probability is there that she has any genuine love of art? However, we shall see. I recollect such a case once in the lower classes, but it is uncommon, very uncommon. Among the peasantry there is nothing to wake it; every cottage is furnished just like every other, and they all live the same hard life and wear the same dress—and as for the bourgeoisie, there you get morality and economy and honest affection, everything that our aristocracy have not, and would be ashamed to possess forsooth!—but love of art, *pecaïre*! I never asked what the girl's husband was—a fool, at all events, if he let himself get killed when he had her for a wife. To be sure, one cannot always choose whether one can live or not—it is not like a business for which one can hire a *remplaçant* for a few hours. Let us find out that street where she says she lives; no doubt she is expecting me.'

He was indeed anxiously expected. As soon as she reached the Maison Crocq, which looked even more grimy than usual, Edmée hurried to tell her story. 'Oh, dear aunt, I forgot how time was passing! You have not been alarmed? I have seen him paint! If I never entered the atelier again that lesson would be priceless, but oh, how could I venture to hope he would think me worth having as a pupil? If you only knew with what perfection he renders every tint! the flowers seem to live on his canvas. They really were not more lovely in marraine's hothouses.'

'Has he agreed to take you?'

'I do not know—he—what will you say? he insists on coming here and seeing you before deciding.'

'Ah, we ought to have foreseen that—of course he does, but after all it matters little; we can certainly trust the old man; he must have pleasant recollections of my family, and would not denounce us. Besides danger is so much lessened!'

'Alas, that means that one is no longer forced to meet carts full of poor creatures going every day to their death. Robespierre has been dead these seven months, but danger is everywhere still, and cruelty too. Our poor little King!' said

Edmée, her eyes filling with tears, as she thought of the recent death of the hapless Louis XVII.

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan shook her head in sorrowful assent.

‘And Madame Royale! one dares not think of what she has endured,’ added Edmée, almost in a whisper. ‘She has lost everything now.’

‘Do not let us speak of these things, *petite*; they will not bear it; let us think of your old painter. You shall light the *creuse-yeux*, as Madelon calls it, and I will sit in that corner with my back to it, and he will certainly not recognise me. It is worth risking something for, and I always liked that old man; I feel sure we can trust him.’

‘Dear aunt, I am ashamed of myself when I find how much more suspicious I am than you!’

‘Yes, child, you are over-suspicious; it is a great mistake. I do assure you it is always better to believe in people than to mistrust them.’

Edmée sighed. She could not escape from the effects of that early training of fear and suspicion which she had had, and these months when she had watched and trembled both for herself and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan were not calculated to efface them, but she was remorseful for her want of confidence in others as for a sin, though the downfall of her ideal in De Pelven rose up pitilessly before her. She began to set the room in order, and presently set coffee and an egg, which she fried on a small stove, before Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, with a fresh roll, a luxury in these days.

‘But you, child, come and dine too,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, drawing her chair to the table with great satisfaction. ‘I hope you have as good an appetite as mine. If we have no superfluities we have all that is necessary. One can make an excellent dinner of eggs and bread. One learns that in these days, and I hope to recollect it all my life, though I confess I have begun to comprehend what we of the upper classes really generally have lost all power of understanding—the pleasure of eating an unusually good dinner. That is why the peasants, who fare so hardly at other times, break out into such gormandising at their weddings, and why the poor country curés look so happy at one’s table. That excellent man at Mortemart, a saint if ever there were one, I am sure—the Abbé Gérusez—his face used to beam with satisfac-

tion when I had a good dinner set before him—and why not? I know that he never had even a bottle of common wine in his *presbytère*, and it was of no use sending him any, for he always found someone who wanted it more than himself. That poor abbé! But you do not eat.'

'I have dined,' said Edmée, who had eaten a piece of bread on the way home, much drier and browner than what Mademoiselle de St. Aignan called necessary. 'I will have a cup of milk.'

She came and went, watering the flowers which she cherished in pots, and smiling at the enjoyment with which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan ate her dinner, all the while dilating on the philosophy which she had acquired.

'Xeres could not taste better to me than this coffee,' she said. 'What a mistake we make in believing such a number of comforts necessary to us, and yet how soon they become indispensable! You know how simple my early life was, and yet when our fortunes improved we began at once to imagine that we must have a number of attendants, and splendid furniture, and delicate dishes. I am glad to find, however, that all this never became really essential to me. I abandoned most of it when I went to Mortemart, and I am not a whit less happy because I open doors for myself, and wear no rouge. The only thing which I really miss is society. I really do think that now you are over-cautious, but do as you like, you always mean well, dear child, and children always fancy themselves wiser than their elders.'

She had not the least suspicion that had she been allowed to do as she liked she would have been guillotined long ere this.

'At all events I shall have someone to talk to if your old painter should come; he will give me some idea how things are going.'

Edmée looked at her anxiously, and almost repented having sought out M. Delys. How many times had this ready sociability, this desire for someone with whom to converse, made her tremble!

'I shall fancy myself taking a *rôle* in a comedy,' continued Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, laughing like a child—as Edmée had never laughed in her life. 'I shall talk to him like any peasant; thanks to my nurse I know our *patois* as well as I do French. You shall see that I puzzle him as if we were at

a masquerade. Get out your paintings, *petite*; what have you that is most attractive?’

Many times that day Edmée looked at her drawings with increasing dissatisfaction, seeing every fault as she had never done before, and losing sight more and more of their merits before the staircase creaked under the tread of M. Delys, who came in all out of breath.

‘You live rather too near the stars for common mortals like me,’ said he, looking round him while he took the chair which she offered him. Although when he was not roused to interest he might have been deaf and blind for anything that he perceived, when his perceptions were awake they were singularly clear and rapid, and he now looked round with a rapid scrutiny which took in all that the room contained. He saw poverty and industry there, for Edmée’s brushes and colours lay beside a heap of boxes and fans, which she had been covering with little bouquets, or Watteau-like scenes. There were a few pots on the window-sill, filled with gay, common spring flowers, raised from a few sous’ worth of seeds, or cuttings from some humble garden, and the aunt was there, as Edmée had said; her back was to the light, so that he could not make out her features, but from her costume he judged her to be some honest peasant.

‘It is all right; the girl told the truth,’ said he audibly. ‘Here is the aunt, and no lover; they are honest and poor. What is your name, my good woman?’

‘Valentin, monsieur, Citoyenne Valentin,’ answered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, suppressing her laughter with great difficulty.

‘So you come from St. Aignan? I perceive that you speak the *patois* of La Bresse.’

‘Yes, my good monsieur; you are very kind to come and see poor people like us. Excuse the liberty which we have taken in asking you to come so high.’

Her voice shook with stifled amusement; he thought it was with emotion.

‘*Bon, bon*, say no more about it; I wanted a walk; I had nothing else to do. If I had, I should not be here. Why, you have let your spectacles fall, *ma bonne*.’

‘Thanks, monsieur,’ she answered, forgetting her part, and speaking in her natural voice, and with the manner of a lady accepting a little service which is her due. She turned

towards him to take the spectacles, which she had borrowed from Madelon as a disguise, and a ray from the lamp fell on her face. M. Delys, already surprised by the change of voice and manner, started back confounded, then rose and bowed deeply, saying, ‘Mademoiselle de St. Aignan!’

‘Oh, this bad man has found me out!’ cried she, gaily. ‘It is so long since I acted comedy that I have forgotten how to do it. Do not look troubled, my child, there is no harm done.’

‘Why do you grudge me the joy of knowing Mademoiselle de St. Aignan safe and well?’ said the painter, reproachfully. ‘You mistrust me, Madame Alain! I am an old misanthrope, of course; no man lives to my age without being one, but you might have told me. I cannot get over it! Mademoiselle de St. Aignan here, in this costume, this place!’

‘We had to look as little aristocratic as possible, my dear monsieur, so I said “I’ll be a peasant, if you like, but bourgeoisie—no!” and I put on this dress and cap, and am very comfortable in it. So you recognised me! And yet I must look much older!’

‘No one who had seen Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could forget her.’

‘Ah, you are bound to say so! But I know I must look an old woman now; happily one gets used gradually to one’s face, but I am sure that if at sixteen we could see what we should be like at sixty, we should fall backwards with consternation!’

‘But how come you here?’ asked M. Delys, much moved, as he recalled her in the old life at St. Aignan. The poor room, which had seemed to him suitable enough for Edmée, all at once looked hardly fit for a human being.

‘It will take too long to explain all that,’ interposed Edmée.

‘No, no, if monsieur care to hear. My tongue has grown quite rusty with want of exercise. Only imagine, dear monsieur, this child has been so frightened by the events of these last years that she still insists on keeping me hidden, though I tell her that no one can want my head, which was never worth much, I daresay—’

‘She is right, a thousand times right, mademoiselle. Your name alone is full of danger, and the mere sight of you would betray an aristocrat.’

‘You say so because I acted my part so badly just now—*fi donc*, monsieur, you should not recall my failures,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, by no means displeased by the very sincere compliment. ‘At all events we lived for a time in a little town no great distance from Moulins, where I had a house which my brother the Count made over to me after my dear sister-in-law died—you remember her, monsieur?’

‘Remember! Ah yes, who could forget her? Her very name has always sounded sweeter to me than any other.’

Edmée looked with moistened eyes at the old man.

‘Then we lived in a horrible house in one part of Paris, after that I had an experience of a place, which made me find this garret charming—such is the life we have led.’

‘And you have borne it all with such patience! such gaiety!’ exclaimed Edmée.

‘It is thanks to you that we have lived at all, my poor child, for whatever I had saved out of the wreck of my fortune—all in *rentes* on the clergy—came to an end long ago in my illness. This child has worked day and night for me, monsieur.’

The two women exchanged a look full of affection, and Edmée bent to kiss Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s forehead. M. Delys noticed the short curls which appeared below the peasant head-dress, and knew at once why the hair had been cut.

‘You are then one of the few who have been arrested and yet escaped!’ he said, ‘how is it you never sought me till today? I might have been of some use.’

‘First of all, monsieur, it was only the painting in Pinard’s shop which betrayed you, and then for months I could only think of my aunt’s health. We had a double reason however for seeking you; besides wanting to learn from you, we hoped—’

‘We hoped to obtain certain information from you,’ continued Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as Edmée stopped in embarrassment. ‘We thought that you might suggest some means of having news of my nephew, who is in exile.’

‘Your nephew, M. le Chevalier, whom I remember at St. Aignan?’

‘Alas! now Count instead of Chevalier, sole heir of our name; his father and brother are both dead.’

‘Unfortunately I never heard his name in any reports

which have reached me. They are so few. I am the worst person whom you could apply to.'

'But try to learn something; I must have news of him,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who even yet had not learned how powerless her 'must' had become, nor, with all her gracious good humour, lost the feeling that she honoured a *roturier* by giving him anything to do for her.

'I was thinking of your family as I came here, mademoiselle; if I recollect rightly there was a cousin, a M. de Pelven—one has heard his name occasionally in these last years—'

'We want nothing from M. de Pelven,' interrupted Edmée.

'My child, how unreasonable you are! Can you imagine, monsieur, why she dreads my poor cousin as if he were all the Jacobins in one? She implores me, almost with tears, not to tell him where we are, and it really grieves me, for his kindness to us has been extreme; he protected us at Mortemart, and enabled us to get to Paris, where he used to visit us constantly, and gave us every hope of obtaining permission for my nephew to return.'

'Ah! Of course you know the part which he has taken in public affairs?' began M. Delys, hesitatingly, for he knew that diversity of political opinions had split up the most attached families.

'Yes, yes, but his good heart led him astray; he was not an enthusiast, far from it, but he made the same mistake as so many others, he thought it was enough to make laws for the nation, and then found they had to create a nation for the laws! I feel sure that this was what misled him,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who had half-unconsciously spent a good deal of time and ingenuity in whitewashing De Pelven to herself. 'You have never met him? A delightful man! he had all the tradition of perfect ease and good breeding which is passing away so fast. Even if he merely said "Yes, madame," he said it as no one else could! This Revolution will destroy good manners. Formerly well-bred people respected the views of others; if they had no religion themselves, for instance, they never mocked at those who had. All that is altered now.'

'I am afraid that that is too true, mademoiselle.'

'I do not mean that De Pelven was a saint or a hero, nor

a genius of the first order,' continued Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who mingled a great deal of shrewd common-sense with considerable obstinacy, 'but he is one of those men who, at a given moment, have just the right sort of talent for the occasion; they always strike the right note, and that of itself makes them remarkable men. Others fail, who have more genius, because they make no allowance for society not being composed of saints and heroes, or expect to reach the promised land without first going through the desert, or, on the other hand, they are always expecting that someone will try to corrupt them. De Pelven never would make that sort of fatal mistake.'

'He is more likely to corrupt others!' murmured Edmée with a look of pain and anger which did not escape the old painter, who glanced at her, and said, 'I have not heard much about him, but I have occasionally met him in the salon of a lady for whom I painted two flower-pieces, and whose picture-gallery I undertook to arrange, and it seems to me that Madame Alain is wise.'

'I cannot understand either of you,' exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, impatiently, 'but I give in, niece, I give in!'

'What does she call her?—my aunt—my niece—what is all this?' said M. Delys, loud enough to be heard, and Edmée turned crimson, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan hesitated, and then exclaimed, 'Well, they say truth is always best; anyhow it can do no harm here. This child is my niece, monsieur, and my very dear niece too, because one day she saved my nephew's life by marrying him.'

M. Delys sat dumb, too much astounded to find a word of answer.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BIRDS ARE FLOWN.

EDMÉE was the first to speak. The astonishment of M. Delys seemed to have made a disagreeable impression on Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who was silent, and looked annoyed and contrite. Edmée smiled at her, and turning to

M. Delys, said with grave dignity, which made him lose sight in a measure of the fact that she was only a steward's daughter, not even one of that honest bourgeois class which the noblesse held in such utter disdain, 'Since you have heard so much, monsieur, you had better hear all. There is no one to blame—not even myself.'

'You, my dear one! you acted like the noble girl that you are!' cried Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and M. Delys, overwhelmed with astonishment, asked himself what circumstances could possibly have bowed the St. Aignan pride to approve of such a *mésalliance*.

'I feel the honour which you do me, madame,' he answered with respect, adopting quite unconsciously an entirely different tone to the young Comtesse de St. Aignan to that which he had used with little Edmée Leroux.

'First of all, monsieur,' interrupted Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, drawing Edmée to her side, 'I must tell you that the Revolution brought dissension into our family as into many others. My poor brother was bent on joining the Princes, and my nephew would not fight against his countrymen, Republicans or not——'

'And he did well!' said M. Delys, emphatically.

'Unfortunately his father did not think so, and there were very painful disputes between them. The Chevalier always leant to the views of his mother's family, and that annoyed the Count. Alas! the closest ties have been shattered in these last years. Finally, my brother determined to fly to Switzerland, the Chevalier was to join him after securing certain papers and money left at St. Aignan—unhappily the place had caught the revolutionary fever—this child heard the plans for his arrest——'

'Ah, monsieur, his mother was my godmother; she comforted my own poor mother on her sick-bed—I loved her so dearly!'

'Madame la Comtesse was an angel,' said M. Delys. 'The angels spread their wings and fled before the crimes of these years could begin.'

'True, and yet even now it is impossible not to regret her,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; 'there are some losses which last one one's life, and leave our hearts and arms empty for ever. When I reflect how at the utmost it is but fugitive thoughts which after a time we give to the dead or the absent, it astonishes me that her loss is almost as fresh to me

as ever. No, never shall I become reconciled to it. Well, they settle to arrest my nephew at night, and Edmée ponders how to save him. She slips out and runs off to the château——'

'You understand, monsieur, that I had never seen him since his mother's death, and he recollected my existence as little as you did,' said Edmée, eagerly. The old man bowed gravely.

'She was not in time to effect his escape,' continued Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. 'The people burst in, found them together—there was a scandalous and cruel scene, you can imagine it for yourself; a thousand years in Purgatory would hardly have been worse for this poor child——'

'I understand it all. They spared him on condition that he married her.'

'Yes, monsieur; he was so young that surely life must have been dear to him, but I know he only thought of me,' and she lifted up her downcast eyes with a light of exultation in them.

'They walked all night to Mortemart, the poor children; he could not stay, of course, but he left this poor little one with me, and since then we have heard nothing from him. Most unfortunately he did not know we were in Paris when for a short time he returned here.'

'You see, monsieur,' said Edmée, more calmly, 'that we must find him and release him from a civil bond which to Catholics is nothing but a form. Divorce can be easily obtained, only he must return and seek it.'

M. Delys looked at the elder lady, who answered by a glance which plainly said that this was by no means what she wished. He perceived that she had grown so attached to the girl who had been her joy and support during this time of trial that she overlooked her plebeian origin. Moreover, though this did not strike him, to a true aristocrat everything not noble seemed much on a level, whether bourgeois or peasant, and a marriage with a financier's daughter would have appeared as great a *mésalliance* as with a steward's. 'Poor white flower!' said the painter, looking at Edmée, who charmed him more and more. 'I suspect that if you did not love your husband when you married, you have learned to do so since.' Fortunately, this time his thoughts were not uttered audibly.

'I have sometimes wondered whether my nephew can be

supporting himself by painting,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. 'He had an hereditary love of it, and cannot now be serving with the army, since, De Pelven says, no aristocrats were allowed to remain with it.'

'I do not know whether we can quite trust what he said?' added Edmée very low.

'He knew that you were the wife of M. de St. Aignan, madame?'

'Perfectly well,' Edmée answered emphatically.

'This De Pelven must have been sorely tempted to lay his black hands on her—she is enchanting! she steals into one's heart unawares,' thought the old man. 'What did you think that I could do for you, mesdames?'

'We thought that if he were really studying art he would probably be in Italy, and that you might hear of him through some mutual friend.'

'Then you only expressed a wish to be my pupil as a means of getting news of him?'

'No, no, dear monsieur, if you think me worthy of such an honour. There have been female artists, you know—Madame Vien, Madame Lebrun—only I must not spend all the day in your atelier, for I have my work for Pinard. I gain a good deal now; I believe I could pay for my lessons——'

'What lessons?'

'Why, yours, I hope.'

'You are dreaming!'

'Are they so expensive?' asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, astonished by the rough answer.

'I never sell my lessons.'

'Then I have only to excuse myself for having asked the favour,' said Edmée, much vexed and surprised.

'No, I never sell my teaching. I sometimes give it. I have already more money than I want. Let me see what you can do.'

He had become only the art judge; this was not the Comtesse de St. Aignan before him, but an aspirant to enter the sanctuary, and he frowned as he turned from a group of flowers which he had studied for a long time in silence, to the fans and boxes which she humbly placed before him. Her heart sank at his protracted silence, nor was his tone reassuring when he suddenly began, 'What! do you mean that you do this kind of rubbish? You have reached this point without a master, and you waste your time, you spoil

your manner by painting boxes and fans ! It is shameful, it is unpardonable, I tell you !'

'Dear master, we have to live,' said Edmée, smiling, and much relieved.

'Live !' said the painter, contemptuously. 'What is life to art ? Is there not rubbish enough already in the world without adding to it ? Live ! No one can be an artist who cannot sacrifice himself.'

'But not others,' said Edmée, lowering her voice as she looked towards Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who was trying to comprehend why the old man was indignant, and asked in great disappointment, 'Does she paint badly then ? I thought she did so well !'

'And so she does !' exclaimed M. Delys, remorsefully. 'I am an old fool, that is all. Pardon my incivility, madame.'

'I had rather you called me "mon enfant," as you did this morning,' said Edmée, with her irresistible sweetness. 'Or your pupil.'

'So you shall be—both, dear child, both,' he answered, kissing the hand which she had put into his, and entirely forgetting the misanthropy on which he prided himself. 'Listen, I have several rooms in the Louvre ; you shall occupy them with Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and everyone shall suppose you are my daughter. You could not have a safer, more unsuspected asylum. For everyone you will be Madame Alain. Do you consent ?'

'With all my heart, if my aunt agree.'

'Certainly, when one is asked to exchange a garret for the Louvre one is hardly likely to decline,' laughed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. 'Once before I lodged in a palace, but there I had no choice whether to accept or decline the invitation. I confess this is more acceptable. I only hope that I need not go on foot ; for I am stout, as you see, and I find that high heels do not accord with walking. I tried once to do without them, but then I could not walk at all.'

'We will arrange all that,' said M. Delys, delighted with his plan, and the radiant pleasure which lighted up Edmée's face. 'There are many reasons why the plan suits me—do not thank me, I beg, I detest thanks ; I suggest this simply for my own pleasure. I never do kindnesses, as you will find. You will work in my atelier and be my *compagnonne*,' he

added, smiling, and Edmée returned the smile as she heard the familiar *patois* word.

‘Yes, yes, so I will,’ she answered.

‘And you will call me father?’ he added, wistfully, but at that the bright look fled, for the word recalled nothing but what was painful. ‘If you wish it,’ she said reluctantly; ‘but I like *mon maître* better.’

As M. Delys left the room she detained him to whisper, ‘Remember we are Madame Alain and Mademoiselle Valentin, and above all, let no word of us reach that M. de Pelven, of whom we spoke.’

He nodded with full understanding, and she began making preparations for their sudden move, which was to take place the next day, and must be broken to Madelon, who could not be expected to be well pleased. Madelon was far from pleased, but she was a reasonable woman, and juster than landladies usually are. ‘Well, well,’ she said, when the news had been imparted, ‘it is everyone for himself in this world, and if you have a friend who will receive you, I suppose you will go, though it is a loss to me. I shall perhaps not let this room as well again, and I shall miss *la petite*, though no doubt after a time I shall get other lodgers. My rooms are never long empty. Madelon Crocq is well known in the quarter.’

‘To think we have been here so long, and the woman can let us go with so little sentiment!’ whispered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to Edmée.

‘And since you are decidedly going, after all perhaps it is best,’ pursued Madelon. ‘I was in two minds whether to tell you or not, but this morning a fellow came here asking if I had rooms to let, and who my lodgers were, and whether I had not a young girl and a middle-aged woman with me, and a dozen other questions.’

‘But who could he have been?’

‘I know not; some *mouchard*, I suppose.’

‘What did you tell him?’

‘As little as possible, you may be sure; but I could see he had been making enquiries in the quarter and knew something.’

‘Why did you not tell us at once?’

‘It might have frightened you away, and lost me a good tenant, for that you really have been. I have nothing to complain of. And after all it may mean nothing; one should not notice every little thing.’

‘It means that De Pelven is again in Paris!’ Edmée said to herself, while Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was questioning Madelon with more interest and amusement than anxiety, as to all which this supposed *mouchard* had said and done, and the hours seemed terribly long to her until they were safely out of the Maison Crocq, on their way to the Louvre, without having told Madelon what their destination was. Indeed that prudent woman declined to know it. ‘What I have never heard I cannot tell,’ said she. ‘I ask no questions. You have paid me well, and that is all which concerns me,’ and she scolded her husband as he stood looking after the *fiacre* which conveyed her lodgers away, and told him there was no need to see which way it turned. She was snappish all day, and pulled the furniture in the empty room about with unnecessary vigour, and answered shortly when Madame Amat cried a little over the flowers which Edmée had bequeathed to her, but everyone accepted it as a matter of course that when Madelon was sorry she should be cross. It was a great satisfaction to her to see the *mouchard* hanging about that evening, watching the house. He did not appear again; the neighbours told him that there had been a flitting that day from the Maison Crocq, and so De Pelven found that once more his prey had slipped through his fingers.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BALMAT IN HIS STUDIO.

ALTHOUGH the Louvre was a palace, in some respects it resembled the Maison Crocq. Evil smells, noise, and disorder pervaded it, and the followers of the classic school, exaggerating, as always, the doctrines of their master, used to amuse themselves at the same time as they expressed their contempt for what they styled ‘those unworthy Italians,’ by playing tennis against the paintings put away and forgotten in the galleries.

The Louvre had gone through its own special revolution since the days when a Court inhabited it; an aristocracy still dwelt there, but it was the aristocracy of talent, often as pitilessly exclusive and overbearing as that of birth. Mademoi-

selle de St. Aignan and Edmée were added to the many artists' families already established there without exciting any question. Everyone knew, liked, and laughed pleasantly at the old painter, whose oddities made him rather more than less popular, and at any other time there would no doubt have been considerable surprise at this sudden apparition of his 'daughter,' with an elderly lady, whom he called Mademoiselle Valentin, and treated with extreme deference. But now for several years everyone had been living in such peril and retirement that nobody knew or cared to know his neighbour's concerns, and no appearance or disappearance excited much wonder. To all but Balmat Edmée was M. Delys' daughter, and someone having heard that her husband's fate was unknown, her position was at once recognised, and she was accepted as a permanent inhabitant of the 'Atelier du Lys,' as it was now universally called; for Balmat's name for it took the fancy of his fellow-pupils, and not a few sketches were made surreptitiously or from memory of 'the white-armed daughter of Fingal,' as they named her, from the poems which were becoming a sort of text-book to the artists of that day.

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan fitted admirably into the singular society in which she now found herself. She had, as Edmée knew, the happy faculty of adapting herself to all circumstances, with an invincible good humour which had been priceless to them both, but there had been a time when her very lightheartedness had made her enemies. It was impossible for her to refrain from a jest. 'Let me say it, and then if I must I will ask pardon,' she would exclaim; but in this artist-world ready wit or raillery only amused, and called forth retorts which she took in the best part. No one could ever forget in conversing with her that she was a person of *la bonne compagnie*. A circle of men, young and old, was sure to gather round her of an evening, deserting for her far younger and prettier persons; M. Delys had unawares created a salon when he installed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan in the Louvre, and she was by no means indifferent to the compliments of this literary and artistic world, where beauty or talent alone were prized. She was infinitely more popular than Edmée, who had other things to think of than to amuse or please, and cared nothing at all for admiration, to a degree which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could not but feel an absolute fault and failure in a woman's first duty. Edmée was

one to steal unawares into a few hearts, and reign there evermore, and be amply satisfied with her kingdom, and to all outside of it she was culpably indifferent, as Mademoiselle de St. Aignan observed with a distress almost comic to M. Delys, in one of their many confidential conversations. It was fortunate for him that politeness no longer put life in peril, for to save his head he could not have said 'tu' to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. He could not recover from his astonishment at her gay contentment when he thought in what different circumstances he had known her, and he admired as surprising philosophy what was chiefly the effect of a happy disposition. If, however, it had been possible for him to quarrel with her he would have done so every day which they spent together; for she professed entire disbelief in the bad character which he loved to give himself, disputed the fact of his cynicism, and assured him that he had one of the kindest hearts in the world. Since respect would not allow him to contradict her flatly, he could only walk up and down, pushing his wig despairingly on one side, and protesting vehemently, to the delight of their audience; for these scenes generally took place after his day's work was over, and a more or less numerous circle of visitors was gathered in the room which he had furnished and made over to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan as her salon.

'What morit is there—can there be in offering a home to a person who is—who is—in short who is my daughter's aunt?' he would exclaim, growing hopelessly embarrassed as he recollected that he must not say who 'Mademoiselle Valentin' was.

This warfare amused Edmée not a little; she was learning to laugh as well as to paint. Never had the poor child led so peaceful a life, though haunted by the thought of the bond by which she was fettered. Sometimes she would call herself by the name which she was resolved never to bear, but which she loved so much. 'Edmée de St. Aignan,' she would whisper, with a sort of fear, not without its charm. 'Ah, it is a pity! . . .' and the sentence ended in a sigh. Daily she watched M. Delys' face to see if he had had any news, but none came, and perhaps the old artist, happy in the pupil whom he had so unexpectedly obtained, and not displeased with the new life which had sprung up around him, made no very strenuous efforts to obtain any, and gradually her art began to absorb her more and more, leaving little room for other thoughts. M. Delys took such delight in her painting

that he half forgot his own, and would allow—unheard of thing!—the flowers before him to fade, while he advised her what colours to use, or confided to her some method invented by himself of producing the transparent effect of a petal, or the wrinkled or lustrous surface of a leaf. The only condition which he made on adopting her as pupil and daughter was that she should cease to work for anyone else, and she could not object, since, as her adopted father, he insisted on paying all the expenses of herself and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; it made him happy, and on this point he was inflexible. A new life had begun for the old man, since his white lily had taken root in his atelier, and he poured out all the tenderness which had been stored up in his heart almost unknown to himself, on the head of this girl, who seemed come to give him the home affections which he had always longed for and never known, and to continue his fame. He made Mademoiselle de St. Aignan smile by his adoration of his pupil, but she could not entirely concur in the satisfaction with which he saw Edmée's devotion to art.

'It is fatal to her success in a social point of view,' she would urge. 'She might as well be absorbed in a *grande passion*. In my nephew's absence I grant you it may be a useful safeguard, but it is not natural; she will be more the artist than the woman, and the question will be, will Alain care for her? A woman's chief duty is to charm.'

'She has not a beauty *de passeport*,' M. Delys would answer, with great impatience, 'but whoever has a soul must be enchanted with her.'

'Ah, my good friend, you forget what young men are. My nephew is young, all his illusions still fresh, he is full of life, of energy, he cannot have any of the qualities of a husband. When one is over thirty, when a man has exhausted life, he feels that it is time to marry, to settle down, even if he does not intend to live *en bourgeois*, a humdrum domestic life—but a young noble, like Alain—'

'If he cannot appreciate our treasure, let him stay away or divorce her, mademoiselle!' cried M. Delys, exasperated, though Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was only expressing sentiments perfectly in accord with the usual manner of speaking and feeling of her class and time; 'What! he finds a lily with a golden heart only waiting to be gathered, and hesitates!'

‘You are romantic, my poor friend! I know the world better than you do. Now for my part I could wish that the child would spend a little time over accomplishments, such as dancing, instead of those perpetual paints of yours. It is of inestimable value to dance well—indispensable to men or women. I have known a most excellent, charming person fail to make a good impression, because he bowed awkwardly in the minuet, on a spectator whose approbation and esteem he would have given half his fortune to obtain. But that first unhappy impression never could be effaced. It was impossible. That excellent M. de Malesherbes himself’—in the ardour of her discourse she had for a moment forgotten the tragic associations connected with that venerated name of the good and brave man, who from assured safety returned to plead in the defence of his King, and perished with all his family on the scaffold, but they returned upon her as M. Delys involuntarily bent his head in reverence, and for a moment she was silent, but then, gaining additional strength from the deep respect which was universally felt for the subject of her moral, she resumed, ‘Well, Marcel said of him to his father that considering the awkwardness of his gait he would never get on either in the magistracy or the army. “He will never make a dancer as long as he lives,” Marcel declared, “the only reasonable plan is to let him enter the Church.”’

‘The event proved him wrong,’ observed M. Delys drily.

‘Yes, but what I want you to see is how much is felt to depend on good dancing. That feeling at least is unchanged, even in these days when Paris is become a place where a few madmen are shut up, but a great many more are loose. Do you not see, dear monsieur, in these disorganised times we are absolutely bound to keep up civilised manners and habits? That is why I have resumed powder; it has always been held as a thing that civilised nations could not dispense with. Once relax all those little matters, as foolish people call them, and it is like letting in that trickle of water which soon melts away the dyke which keeps out the sea.’

M. Delys took off his round wig and contemplated it, as he was accustomed to do when an argument failed him, but he did not look convinced.

‘On one thing at least we are both agreed,’ said Made-moiselle de St. Aignan, ‘there shall be no other Countess than our little Edmée.’

‘Yes, certainly, yes but she seems so contented, so happy as she is; it is a vast pity to distract her thoughts from art; she makes progress, wonderful progress, and if your nephew should return it might fill her mind with other things, but still I suppose one must put up with it.’

‘Fill her mind with other things! I should hope so. And then I myself. My nephew is the only one left alive of my family now; I want him. Hush, there she is; not a word of all this. We are going to surprise our good Swiss in his comical studio; he will give no account of himself or his doings, and Edmée thinks he looks out of spirits, so we shall go and cheer him. Imagine, that poor fellow was so poor last winter that he had to go to bed at five o’clock many evenings because he was too cold to sit up, and had no fuel or oil for his lamp! We only found it out by accident—indeed, Edmée was too much occupied by my illness to think of anything else, and only learned it from his joy when someone or other paid him a trifle for keeping an atelier in order.’

‘He would not gain much by that,’ grunted M. Delys, so snappishly that she instantly perceived who the benefactor had been, and playfully threatened him with her finger. ‘Ah, the bad man! the cruel cynic, who never does a charitable action! have I met with him again? It is astonishing how he is always crossing my path!’

‘I cannot have everything deep in dust, mademoiselle, and have no time to attend to such matters myself. Dust is my greatest enemy—ruins oil-painting.’

‘Yes, yes, I understand! Adieu, since our *fiacre* waits.’

The little expedition pleased and amused Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who had a very kindly feeling towards Balmat, though she had not found him amusing, which was always a crime in her eyes, and Edmée had resolved to see for herself what were the hopes for the painting which she knew he had been secretly working at for months, too timid and disheartened to do so before his fellow-students, and only giving it such time as he could spare from avowed work in the atelier with them. Happily for him no one but Isnard had ever discovered the refuge which he had found in the desecrated cloister, and there at least he could work unmolested by any outward and visible difficulties, though after all his worst foe was the hereditary depression always lying in wait to spring out and seize him, and which was as certain in such

a temperament to follow success as unsucess, clutching its victim, and with a pitiless finger pointing out each fault and failure, overwhelming him with the sense 'of incompleteness in the face of what was won,' and veiling all merits just when all around would suppose him rejoicing in a completed task.

The departure of Edmée from the Maison Crocq had been a great misfortune for Balmat, who lost in her his chief interest in daily life, the one person to whom he could speak freely of home, of difficulties, of discouragements, who was sure that he had talent, however rebellious, and out of the very happiness of her own progress sympathised keenly with those who seemed toiling in vain. He did not often seek her in the Louvre; of an evening there was too gay a circle in Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's salon for him to feel at ease there, and they could only exchange a few words when he came in according to old habit to arrange the atelier of M. Delys, and feed the stove. He missed Edmée exceedingly, but was too humble to guess that she could miss him, or how happy it was for her to have come in contact with so candid and pure a mind as his, whose faith was more tolerant, but perhaps more securely rooted than her own: to know Balmat had widened her sympathies. At first indeed she shrank timidly from points on which they must disagree, and felt as if his heresy set an impassable gulf between them, though she could not feel the horror and aversion which she might have done had they met accidentally in quiet times, nor did she experience the disdain of a born aristocrat for what she would have been taught to think 'a bourgeoisie religion.' It was not through controversy, but through contact that she unawares imbibed some of his views, and learned that below the surface his faith and hers rested on the same foundation. Intimate acquaintance with one of another land, educated in a way novel to her, could not but enlarge her mind, but Balmat had done more for her than this. He had given her a sense of protection which had kept her from sinking under anxiety and loneliness, and had strengthened her wavering belief in goodness and truth at a critical period of her life. Theirs was a very pure and perfect friendship, founded on mutual esteem and affection, with gratitude on each side, though neither was fully aware what each had done for the other. The visit of the two ladies evidently startled him, but he received them cheerfully, and showed Mademoiselle de St.

Aignan all the arrangements which he had made for his studio. Art was to him too sacred a thing for the idea to occur that he was profaning a consecrated place by thus establishing himself in it, and indeed churches and cloisters were at that time turned to far less holy purposes than this, and had few tenants as innocent and reverent as the young Swiss. His good sense always helped him effectually in all practical matters, and he had constructed a studio very cleverly at little or no cost. There were only absolute necessities in it, but he had space and a well-managed light, and a half-finished painting stood on the easel. His visitors came to inspect it, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan watching the face of Edmée to be guided to a just opinion, and Balmat watched it too, knowing well that though personal feeling would lead her to judge tenderly, honesty and love of art would be stronger still. It proved as he expected, for a look of irrepressible disappointment stole over her countenance, as she stood contemplating the painting, whose cold, pale correctness and flat smoothness of handling were peculiarly displeasing to an eye accustomed to delight in colour, and unversed in anatomical merits. Balmat's wistful look changed into a patient and humble resignation. 'I know your opinion already,' he said, then turning to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, 'And what do you think of it, mademoiselle?'

'I!—I am no judge, my dear Balmat,' she answered, adding later to Edmée in private, 'You know, *ma belle*, I could not tell him I thought it hideous, though that is what it seemed to me—' and after a further consideration, she asked, 'What is the subject?'

'Thetis bearing armour to her son Achilles.'

She looked at it again, evidently trying to find something agreeable to say.

'I suppose it is only just begun?' she suggested. 'One cannot tell yet what it will be, or perhaps it was your first picture?'

The eyes of Balmat and Edmée met; hers were full of sympathy, and he smiled, but it was a painful smile.

'Mademoiselle your aunt is a severe critic,' he said, unconsciously pushing his palette away.

'I am sure she would greatly like to see some of your sketches of every-day life, Jacques,' said Edmée, who sometimes called him so when she wished especially to please or

encourage him ; ' do show her some,' and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, aware that she had somehow said the wrong thing, hastened to express great desire to see the sketches. Her assumed interest soon became real, for what Balmat now placed before her were vigorous portraits of what she perfectly understood, as forcible and living as his classical subject was lifeless.

' Why, surely these are admirable ! ' she exclaimed, forgetting to look to Edmée for leave to admire. ' I told you I was no judge, but these seem actually living. See, my child, this one which he calls " mon bel œillet," this girl selling flowers, how she turns her head, and looks up to offer her bouquets with a little inviting air—and here, this old woman sitting selling brooms ; I seem to have seen her a dozen times, though that is only because she is so truly the broom-seller. This I understand. Show me some more, my dear Balmat.'

' They are indeed admirable, Jacques,' said Edmée. ' How you have improved ; you have overcome all your difficulty of dealing with colour in these sketches ; one never suspects you—forgive me, my good Balmat !—when one sees these of being more the engraver than the painter.'

' It is unfortunate for me that I learned to engrave watch-cases under my father,' said Balmat. ' I never can shake off the effects of that training.'

' No, one sees it when you try to paint in David's manner, but not here.'

' But what is this ? *Ah, ciel !* how could you draw this ? ' exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as Balmat placed before her a black-robed figure, with hands hanging down but clasped together, and a look of tearless, unutterable woe, as of one crushed by guilt, but guilt not her own.

' Antigone,' answered Balmat, shortly.

' But that tells me nothing ! I know not—I have forgotten who your Antigone was. Does Corneille speak of her ? Take it away ! What is the use of painting such a thing ? It will haunt me !'

' It is wonderful ! ' said Edmée, low, and holding it fast. ' Jacques, I had no idea you could paint thus ! You are a true painter !'

But Balmat did not seem gladdened by the marvelling admiration with which Edmée gazed at the sketch.

' I did not imagine it ; it is only a portrait,' he said, sighing.

' A portrait ! and whose ?'

‘I do not know. It was a face which I had a glimpse of in the Luxembourg, and it would not let me rest until I had it on canvas.’

‘Ah, it is a portrait,’ said Edmée, much disappointed; but after a pause she said, ‘How excellently you have managed the light, and the simple, straight folds of the drapery, and yet they do not recall a model, or a statue’s. There is more there than a mere portrait. Do you know, I think you have been making a mistake all this time? Why do you persist in attempting classic subjects which nobody can put any heart into? We are not Greeks or Romans, and never shall be, however hard we try—the Greeks and Romans are buried, and we shall never bring them to life again, or forget we are French, and live in the eighteenth century.’

Balmat shook his head, and remarked that without knowing it she was talking in a very revolutionary manner.

‘It is true, however,’ observed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; ‘we forget too much that nations and ideas die and are buried, and cannot be revived.’

‘If I were you,’ pursued Edmée, earnestly, ‘I would make paintings from life, and nothing else; from daily scenes which make one smile and sigh. That is what you are meant to do, it is evident.’

‘Flower-girls—*gagne petits*?’ said Balmat, shaking his head, with a sigh and a smile. ‘Yes, I can do those—as many *pochades* as you will.’

‘And do them as very few can! Your *pochades* are superb! It is clear that you ought to do them! Did not that David whom you worship say the other day to one of you that he wished you to paint according to your nature, and not against it? Did he not tell you that Nature was the only teacher who never erred?’

‘Yes, you are right; but what would our poor master say if all the result of his efforts, of his teaching to make art return to its ancient purity—he who is now striving to become more truly Greek, as he says—if a pupil of his took up a line like Boucher or Valentin?’ said Balmat, dismayed by Edmée’s audacity, and feeling to his fingers’ ends the probable sarcasms of David, whose imperious and domineering temper, combined with his great reputation, told very disadvantageously on the humbler and more timid of his scholars, even after they had long left his atelier.

'No one wants you to paint like Boucher! I hate his pictures, I never look at them. I want you to be like yourself. Show this Antigone to David; see what he says—to please me, Jacques! You have never done anything approaching her. Do you hear me? What does it matter if she be but a portrait? After all you have rendered what you saw with wonderful energy and truth. I am tired of these classic subjects, all just alike, and reminding one of statues instead of human beings. It is clear that you should not waste time on what you do badly when there are things which you can do so well.'

'It seems like lowering art, and rather than do that I would break my brush.'

'I do not think so; is there no poetry in everyday things?' answered the girl, eagerly, all unconscious that she was urging the doctrines of a school one day to overthrow all which David had taught. 'If I painted figures and landscape instead of flowers, what a pretty picture I could make of a very common sight—the Feast of the Rogations. I would just put what I have seen at St. Aignan, the stream and the trees for a background, and the procession coming with our curé, and the *scours*, and the notables of the village, while the women and girls should be round the altar which they have built. Ah, how pretty we made our altar! It was only a table from some cottage near, covered with a white sheet, and candlesticks and flowers, but it looked so fresh, so pure in the open air, with a bower of green branches over it; and how pleasant it was to go out and gather all the wild flowers we could for it! I do so miss the *fêtes*!' she ended, sighing, for even leaving out of the question the deep want which the banishment of all signs of religion left in inward life, the absence of all the pomp and ceremony which varied the Christian year, and satisfied the craving for something less monotonous and sordid than daily life, caused a vast blank, especially to women.

'I should like to paint that now!' said Balmat, with a generous feeling of taking the vanquished side; 'but I suppose no one would dare to so much as look at it.'

'But do leave your Lives of Plutarch and Ossian, and paint as I tell you!' urged Edmée.

'Perhaps you are right; I will think about it,' he answered; but Edmée did not in the least guess with what

an effort he admitted the thought that perhaps it would be his duty to renounce the dreams of painting great classic subjects, such as he believed true art dictated, for the humble walk which Edmée urged. For the moment it was as if she had taken away his brush, and bade him paint no more.

‘You read between whiles?’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, taking up a little brown book, which he had laid aside, on a chair. ‘Why it is a Bible!’

She looked at him with as much astonishment as if it had been the Koran.

‘Yes, I read it every day,’ he answered simply.

‘You have read it daily in these times?’ exclaimed Edmée, with a different but even greater astonishment.

‘Certainly; we always read a chapter or two at home, and my mother gave me this, her own copy; you see it is old. She had it from *her* mother, and told me never to miss doing so. I know they always think of me, and pray for me after the reading.’

‘But if anyone knew of it, you would have been—might still be—guillotined as a “fanatic”!’

‘Well, you yourself; have you not risked as much in wearing your cross?’

‘The gold cross which marraine gave me? Of course I have worn it.’

‘Silly child! I never guessed it, or I should never have permitted such rashness,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan.

Edmée smiled a little wilful smile, and put her hand up to her bodice where the cross was hidden.

‘And of course I have read my Bible—my Father’s message to me. Besides,’ continued Balmat, his face lighting up, ‘if one wants poetical subjects, here they are as I said to them yesterday in the atelier, what ever came up to the description of Christ sitting under the little alcove by the well, looking over the corn-fields under the Eastern sky? or with the little children gathering round his knees?’

‘As you said in the atelier!’ exclaimed Edmée, amazed beyond expression, for not only was it dangerous in the highest degree to make an open profession of faith at this time, but it required such courage as she could hardly imagine to have made it in such a company.

‘Yes, they were discussing Ossian and Werther, and Maurice Quai declared Ossian was greater than Homer, and

somehow they got to speaking of Italian religious pictures, and then of the Bible, and if any one of them ever read it, it was in some absurd abridgment—but I do not think they had.’

‘And then?’ asked Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, wondering at the unconscious heroism of the quiet Balmat.

‘Oh, they are good fellows, after all—they said nothing at all for a moment, and then one and another came and shook hands with me.’

‘We are interrupting you too long,’ said Edmée; ‘but remember what I have said.’

‘There is no fear of my forgetting! But you do not interrupt me; Isnard was coming to sit for the hands. By-the-by, you had better go before he arrives

‘Why? Do you mistrust him?’

‘Not exactly; but a man so vain is never to be trusted. One does not know what he may be led to do. I do not want to speak against him, for it is kind to let me paint his hands, since it saves me a model.’

‘Ah! but I have noticed he is vain of his hands; I dare say he likes to have them copied.’

‘Then he is often gratified, for we all use his arms and hands in the atelier. Those of us who are best formed often pose for the others,’ he explained to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, ‘but he does not often come now; he has gone over to Guérin, otherwise he would know where you live, which is a mystery to him. He came yesterday to me, and said he had been to the Maison Crocq, but you had left it; there was a letter which he wanted to give you, and he left it in my charge; I meant to have brought it to-night.’

‘A letter! how did he get it? Why, it was sent to Mortemart . . . from whom can it be? Ah, my cousin, the old canon; he escaped to England! Then I have still some of my family left!’ exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, much moved, and while she read her letter Balmat told Edmée unheard that Isnard had vowed revenge on De Pelven, who was now again in Paris, and had succeeded in getting a room adjoining that which De Pelven now inhabited, and kept incessant watch on his proceedings.

‘But it is all so childish!’ said Balmat, impatiently. ‘I do not know how much of earnest there is in it; he has taken so many into his confidence as to the revenge he means some day to have, that really he will be driven to do something, for

fear of becoming a jest with them ; he has managed a spy-hole, through which he can see all that De Pelven does, unsuspected, and this gives him extraordinary pleasure, though he never learns anything important.'

'But how did he get this letter?'

'How De Pelven got it, I do not know, unless he has been at Mortemart, but I suspect that Isnard actually went into his room, and looked about for papers which might compromise him found none, and took this to annoy him.'

'Good heavens !' interrupted Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, 'to think of the dear old man's writing only to ask this ! Does he not know that to receive a letter from an *émigré* is the most dangerous thing possible ? Imagine that he writes to implore me to seek after his pedigree, which he had had drawn out, and entrusted to a friend at the time of his flight ! But he gives me one piece of important news ; Alain, my nephew, is in Italy, probably with Mesdames Adelaide and Victoire. He has, as we supposed, begun to study painting, or rather to pursue it, for I believe he had already made considerable progress some years ago.'

'In Italy ! It must then be possible to have further news. Come, dear aunt, we must go.'

They had to walk a little way to the *fiacre*, waiting for them under an archway ; it would have attracted too much attention to have had it drawn up near the church. When Balmat had put Mademoiselle de St. Aignan into it, making no reply to her desire that he would bring Isnard to her salon, and discover how he had got the letter, he said aside to Edmée, 'It is well that letter is out of De Pelven's hands. It might have been a dangerous weapon. But I think Isnard had better know nothing and change his lodging as soon as he can !'

CHAPTER XXXII.

M. DELYS MAKES A JOURNEY.

It was not an easy thing for Mademoiselle de St. Aignan and M. Delys to secure an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*. She knew his dislike of being interrupted at his work too well to invade his atelier, and even if she had done so they could not

have conversed without attracting the attention of Edmée, while again of an evening the salon was never empty. However, they had agreed on a private signal which should give notice when there was any weighty matter to be privately discussed, for both had plots and plans for Edmée's benefit, though they took different views of what was desirable. These could not be discussed before her, and, having received the given signal one morning, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was not surprised to see M. Delys appear during what were ordinarily his working hours. He had evidently something important to say, but his first words surprised her, for they seemed entirely remote from the subject which she anticipated.

'Mademoiselle,' he began, bowing ceremoniously, and waiting as he always did for her permission to take a chair, for though most people seem scarcely themselves when removed from their familiar surroundings, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was always in his eyes "Grande dame," as in former days—'Mademoiselle, I am getting an old man, and I have this day heard of the death of two acquaintances, one older, one younger than myself. I may soon follow them.'

'My dear friend! why afflict yourself with such gloomy thoughts!'

'They are not gloomy, dear mademoiselle. When my time comes I hope to fall gently as the withered leaves do, without a storm. But it has made me think of our child. She will no doubt be able to support herself by painting, but her health might fail, or a time might come when she had no heart to paint, could do nothing worth producing; such times come in one's life,' he added, rather sadly, recalling past passages of his own history, and without perceiving the enquiring and incredulous expression on the countenance of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, to whom painting seemed the mere copying of a material fact, so that the mechanical skill once acquired, there could be no difficulty in producing any quantity of work at all times and seasons. 'Of course I shall leave her all I have,' he went on, 'she is my daughter, you know. I never thought to have anything so like a child of my own.'

'But you have spoken sometimes of a daughter?' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who had been often puzzled how to reconcile this with what she knew of his early life.

'Yes, I dare say I have, but I never had one. Mine has been what I suppose people call a solitary life; my

parents died years ago, years ago—; I never married or wished to marry; a wife is not in my line, but I have often thought it would have been great happiness to have possessed a daughter who would have worked with me, and of whom I should have been proud. I have pictured her in the atelier until I really sometimes believed she was there, but I never found a name for her to my liking until I had the privilege of knowing madame your sister-in-law, and then I perceived at once that hers was the name I had been so long seeking. Yes, I have seen my Edmée, I am sure of it, leaning over me, looking at my work, but I never could see her paint, nor be sure that she had spoken. And then this child of ours came, and I never see the other now, nor miss her. My heart is filled now—filled now—there is no room for the other Edmée.'

He spoke in a dreamy way, looking away from Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as if hardly aware that she was there, listening with much marvel.

'These artists! these artists!' she was saying to herself, with some sympathy and very tender amusement.

'But I do not know why I am saying all this, mademoiselle. What I came to say was, first, I know you have business talents, and as it is for that dear child's sake, I venture to ask you to look into my money concerns; all I know of them you will find put down in this little book, but I have no time or head for that sort of thing.'

She took the account-book with a good deal of curiosity, for she imagined him necessarily a rich man, from the frugal mode of life which he had always followed, and the sums, very considerable for that day, which were paid for his flower pieces. She had often heard this asserted, with an occasional hint that the old man's chief failing was avarice, and it was with great surprise that she now discovered how moderate were his means, though amply sufficient for his wants, and even for those of the two new members of his family.

'I daresay I am called a miser,' he went on, as if replying to what was in her mind, 'because I do not give to what everyone else does. Why should I? That sort of case takes care of itself, but sometimes people come whom nobody seems to help, and then I give—to get them off my mind, you understand—to get them off my mind.'

'Yes, yes, I understand,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, refraining from tormenting him as usual, for she was a little angry with herself for having given credence to such a charge

against the childlike simple old man, whose large and kindly generosity no one dreamed of; and to whom it seemed such a matter of course that he never thought about it. 'Like ourselves, for instance. But there you are, I know, well repaid by your pupil.'

'Mademoiselle, had I needed repayment, as you call it, I should have had it abundantly in the satisfaction of being of service to you. But I had something else to say. This Leroux is dead?' he had an old jealousy of Leroux, for being Edmée's father, and therefore as it were his own rival — 'certainly dead? He must have left money which should be hers. It would be well to ascertain this.'

'And to ascertain where the title-deeds of the lands are. But who is to do it?'

'Just so.'

'I should greatly like to know what has become of the château, and what the state of things is at St. Aignan, if we knew of anyone who could make enquiries discreetly.'

'Perhaps I may hear of someone, or something might take me there.'

'You, dear friend! If you ever contrived to get so far, you would certainly forget the way back!' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who, with considerable reason, had the lowest possible opinion of M. Delys' power of taking care of himself in daily life. 'You artists see a great deal which is hidden from ordinary mortals, and nothing of all which they perceive at once. By the way, what measures have you taken to learn anything of my nephew?'

M. Delys had not much answer to make; he felt in his guilty soul that he had made no great effort to ascertain anything about Alain, and the conversation ended, nor was anything more said as to a journey to St. Aignan for a considerable time, until he suddenly announced that he could not complete a flower-piece which had been ordered by the bride of the young General Bonaparte, before she joined him in North Italy, without a plant for which he had no study in his portfolios. His patroness was passionately fond of flowers, and took a great and intelligent interest in the commission which she had given him, and he was desirous to please her, though as far as anyone could see the group would have been quite as beautiful without this particular plant, which grew, as he declared, only near St. Aignan. Edmée offered no opposition to his journey, though perplexed as to its real

object, and deeply averse to any renewal of a connection with her old home. M. Delys was delighted at having found a pretext which disguised even from himself that he was going to make a long and troublesome journey for a benevolent purpose, turned a deaf ear to some malicious comments which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could not altogether refrain from making, and set off to find his plant, and see how matters had gone in La Bresse. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan saw him go with but moderate satisfaction, and a conviction that if she could but have gone herself matters would have been much better managed, in which perhaps she was right, for the old painter had none of her ready-witted acuteness ; his mind was generally absorbed by his art, and could not perceive such facts as suited it ; those which did not he ignored, or rather, to all intents and purposes, they did not exist as far as he was concerned. But affection for Edmée gave him clear-sightedness which would never have been roused for himself, and where her interests were concerned he could be keen and cautious. Travelling was still difficult in France, though, under the Directory, there were no longer the innumerable hindrances of a short time back placed in the way of procuring passports and permits of residence, the *coche d'eau* and the *voiture publique* had not yet begun again to communicate with any places off the great high roads. During the last ten years, while the *corvées* gradually fell into disuse, the roads had been falling more and more into disrepair, the paved way in the middle growing more ruinous, the mud on each side deeper, and whereas locomotion had at the best been difficult and even dangerous, in some places it was now absolutely impossible. The risk of highway robbers, and the discomfort at the inns added to the reluctance with which a journey was undertaken, and a night passed in a 'carosse de voiture,' as the stage-coaches were then called, was even less agreeable than one spent in the public dormitory of an inn, where travellers, landlord, and servants all slept together. M. Delys was a timid man, and such intercourse as this with his fellow-creatures was horrible to him. There really was some foundation for Mademoiselle de St. Aignan's persuasion that if he ever succeeded in finding his way to his destination he would never contrive to return, and Edmée grew uneasy about him as the limit which he had fixed for his absence was passed, and yet no news

came of him. That he should write no one expected. To commit anything to writing, and risk its being examined by eyes for which it was not meant was still universally and carefully avoided. Edmée worked as usual in the atelier, where no one disturbed her, and now that summer weather had come there was no pretext for someone from a neighbouring studio coming in to beg for 'braise' from her stove, and M. Delys had put up a large placard on his door with the laconic announcement 'Absent!' which prevented any invasion of buyers or connoisseurs. Balmat was her only visitor. He never failed to come daily and ask if he could do anything for her, and refresh himself by a little talk of his home, and his longing to be able to send his mother a little money. Once he had to tell her how he had received a hamper of little gifts, long delayed on the road, but none the less welcome. 'See, my mother knitted these stockings herself!' he said, displaying them proudly. 'No one knits as she does in the whole village! And my sisters have each made me something; my brother has sent me some of his walnuts—here they are; Mademoiselle your aunt likes walnuts, I know—As for father, he has put in a little money—dear old father!—If I could only send him help instead of taking what he can ill spare I should be a happy fellow! Would you like to see my mother's letter?'

Edmée read it with great sympathy. 'Jacques, you are a fortunate man to have such good parents,' she said.

'Am I not? You see they do not forget me; they pray for me every night. And they know I am doing my best; they never doubt that, though I have nothing to show for it.'

'Jacques, I want you to let me do something. You know I have begun to earn money now; M. Delys said my last picture was worthy of being sold; hitherto he has only let me paint to learn; I had so much to learn!—'

'It is of no use offering me money; I cannot take it. This from home came exactly when I wanted it, and my rent is cleared off; I can pay a model—'

'But wait till I ask you!—I was not going to offer you money, unless in a way you cannot dislike. I want to buy one of your pictures.'

'That is only another way of doing it.'

'Not at all. I really want it. I am going to give very little for it, oh, very little, M. Balmat! for as yet you are

unknown, but I must make haste, for some day your pictures will be above my means—'

'When I am dead, perhaps!'

'Before that, I hope and think. Then I shall send it to your mother, and tell her how kind and true a friend her son has been to me and my aunt. Do you not think it will please her?'

'Yes, dear old mother! I cannot refuse such goodness. And they will not know it is nothing very grand.'

'I do hope, Jacques,' said Edmée, very seriously, 'that your heart is in what you paint? You are not all the while regretting it is not a classic subject which you have in hand?'

'No, I enjoy my painting, or I would not do it at all. I did as you advised, after thinking it well over. I showed my work to David.'

'And he?' asked Edmée, eagerly, aware how greatly Balmat's peace of mind depended on David's opinion.

'He said I had overcome much of my difficulties as to colour, and that the lines of my figures were harmonious and well arranged, but I could see he thought art lowered by such a way of using it.'

'What you draw is true, and from nature, and art rests on nature and truth! Then you are going on bravely?'

'Yes. I think it is the best that is in me to do.'

'And very good it is!' cried Edmée. 'Now see what I am doing; I am afraid that the master will not be satisfied with these roses. Is it best to get the light opaquely upon the colours or transparently through them?' And then they fell into discussing methods of working, and the manner of producing various effects, which lasted until Edmée discovered that it was dinner time, and prevailed, with some difficulty, on Balmat to stay and share her meal, which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan always came to partake of. Balmat always provoked her by the reluctance with which he met her invitations; he always seemed afraid of seeming to have timed his visits expressly to be asked to eat and drink. The more susceptible he was on this point, the surer Edmée felt that he had not money enough to afford himself proper food.

The solitude of the atelier began to grow burdensome as the days slipped by, and she listened sometimes a little enviously to the outbursts of song and laughter from the

room below, where David's noisy pupils were more or less busy. She was very glad when, on coming in one morning, she saw M. Delys again installed before his easel, painting the plant which, as he said, he had gone to St. Aignan to find. She advanced on tiptoe. '*Pan ! Pan !*' said she laughingly, as she put her hands over his eyes, and he recollected immediately the childish game common in that part of France, and known as '*le jeu des fleurs*,' and duly replied '*Who is there ?*'

'It is I,' answered Edmée gaily.

'Who may I be ?'

'The Archangel Gabriel.'

'What does he want ?'

'Not *soucis*¹ at all events,' she answered, interrupting the little jest suddenly. 'Dear master, how glad I am to see you ! What news do you bring ? What have you seen at St. Aignan ?'

'Nothing very cheerful. Rather show me what you have done in my absence ; I have waited for you before I examined it ; besides I had to set to work to paint this flower. See, I brought it in wet mosses ; the whole plant, only look how delicate it is ; it fades like a novice before the breath of the world. How it survived what we went through I know not. The carosse was bad enough ; eight or ten people heaped inside a thing laden with baggage, so that eight horses could hardly drag it along, and at such close quarters that when one got down, one had to ask one's neighbours for one's arms and legs, and then I thought I had lost my purse, and passed a terrible half-hour in consequence—never found it till night, when I discovered it in my boot ; I believe I put it there taking it for my pocket. Let me see what you have been doing.'

He rose and stood before the canvas on her easel, looking alternately at the half-finished group upon it and the flowers which she was copying, while an expression of pleased content came over his face, very pleasant to Edmée.

'Why, this is good, very good,' he said, after some time thus spent. 'You have worked hard in the last year, very hard. This is equal to Madame Vallayer Coster, though she is a member of the Academy ; but observe, these rough leaves

¹ Marigolds, or cares.

require quite a different way of rendering to those. Always fill your mind with the character of a plant before you begin to paint it. You have not caught the poisonous, false air of the hellebore; of course I know that it is difficult to seize the character of a plant so opposite to your own, but the artist comprehends things most opposed to his nature through the imagination—the imagination, not the heart.'

'I will try, dear master,' answered Edmée, smiling at the innocent mysticism of the old painter, and aware that she must wait for news of St. Aignan until he was in the mood to tell them.

'Weigh what I say, my dear child,' he continued earnestly. 'If you knew the world as I do'—Edmée thought how Mademoiselle de St. Aignan would have laughed to herself—'you would discover with what marvellous exactitude every human being has his counterpart in the vegetable kingdom. You may say that I should hardly find a parallel to this detestable hellebore'—he had his likes and dislikes among plants as strong or stronger than any which he felt for men and women.

'Pardon me, dear master,' said Edmée, who, when they were alone, always gave him this title in preference to that of father. She could feel no tenderness for a name associated with Leroux. In destroying for her the meaning of fatherhood he had done her a cruel injury, for like that of some men and most women her system of thought was unconsciously moulded by her own history. 'Pardon me, I myself' know someone who has the same cold, false air of destruction, and who flourishes where better plants would perish.'

'But you have exactly entered into my meaning, my child! There is nothing like a woman for seizing an idea at a bound; a man would have hesitated or argued for an hour before comprehending me. I said that very thing to Maurice Quai, who calls himself a thinker, and pushes David's theories beyond what David himself dreamed of—would destroy all art since Phidias, without exception,—a man who really has a fine mind, and yet he listened—listened with a smile, which expressed nothing unless a sort of pity. When a man does not apprehend your meaning he always thinks it your fault instead of his own. But who is your hellebore?'

'M. de Pelven.'

'Ah! ah! yes, you are perfectly right' and becoming

suddenly thoughtful, he returned to his easel. Presently he said, 'Well, I got to St. Aignan.'

'And how has all fared there?'

'Alas! my child, it was a sad journey. The last time that I went that way the harvest was being gathered in, the fields full of flowers; now one would suppose that war had passed over them. Ruined houses, churches closed or desecrated, wounded men dragging themselves through the villages. And yet there seemed everywhere an inexplicable feeling of hope, of animation, as if the people regarded all this misery as a mere passing tribulation, which they could bear, because it delivered them from an intolerable burden. I cannot explain it; I only tell you the impression I received. In a village where the coach stopped one of the passengers cried, "Vive la République!" and everyone near joined, a wounded man loudest of all, come home minus an arm and a leg!'

'No one remembered you?'

'Of course not. I stopped at the inn, and learned there that—it will be a shock, my dear child—your father is dead.'

Edmée was silent. It was, as he had expected, a shock, all the more that she dared not look too closely into her feelings.

'The estates have been parcelled out, and partially sold, but it seems that it is not easy to get purchasers, as at first, especially if there be any notion that title-deeds may be brought out by-and-by by an old owner. Land is extraordinarily cheap; a field for a sack of corn, they say. There seems to have been no one to keep order in the commune; every man's cattle browse over the old seigneurial domain; the forests are cut down—every farmer and peasant has one way or another got a bit of land, and wants more, if he only had the money. If the enemy were at our gates, the peasant would buy—buy. Things can never now go back to what they were formerly.'

'Has the château itself suffered much?'

'The peasants dance in the hall on Sundays, and their sabots have broken the tiles; you can see too traces of wanton destruction; there have been hatchets and pick-axes used here and there, and one room evidently was on fire; the flames have licked the walls and ceiling. I need not say that every bit of furniture has been carried off. I saw some of it at the inn.'

‘Whom did you see?’

‘I had my tin-box for plants, as you know, and everyone took me for an apothecary looking for his herbs. Your uncle Grabian came out of the mill, and asked if I could recommend anything for his wife’s complaints. I gathered that her temper was what needed curing most. We had a good deal of talk; he is an honest man, and I told him I knew you were alive, and might be communicated with by a letter to the Maison Crocq—I was cautious, you see, for it seems someone else had been down there, making enquiries before me—he went away disappointed though.’

‘Not. M. de St. Aignan?’

‘No, no, child; do not look so startled.’

‘De Pelven, then!’

‘Exactly, but since no one knew anything, he could learn nothing. Evidently he thought you might have returned home, scoundrel that he is! Grabian told me that his brother-in-law, Leroux, died *fort gras*, as they say there, and being an honest man, and fond of you, it seems, he wishes to make over all these savings ——’

‘I want none of it. Who knows how——’

‘Listen, my child; I know what you mean, but this money is justly yours, and would make you independent. I have little to leave; illness might interfere with your own work, and it is not well to look to art as a means of gaining daily bread,’ said M. Delys, with a vindictive recollection of the fans and *bonbonnières*. ‘If you should leave your husband, you would accept nothing from him?’

‘No; again you may never see him more, and then if Mademoiselle de St. Aignan remain with you——’

‘Remain! What can you mean?’

‘Why, you do not suppose that if you renounce your husband he will leave his aunt on your hands?’

‘I never thought of the possibility of our being separated. Am I to lose everything?’ said Edmée, with vehemence which startled M. Delys. ‘No, it cannot, shall not be so.’

‘You must not take it ill, my dear child, that I have accepted your uncle’s offers, and said you would write to him.’

‘I must consider,’ she answered, and he looked at her tenderly, feeling with keen and vain regret how lonely this young life had been, and was, notwithstanding his fond affection, as he saw her thinking, with bent head, and hands

folded together. Except Balmat she had never had anyone to take counsel with.

‘Will you not take your aunt’s advice?’ he asked at last, very gently.

‘I know exactly what she would say,’ answered Edmée, faintly smiling. ‘She would advise anything, no matter what, unless it were absolutely dishonourable, which she thought could add to my happiness.’ And she added to herself, ‘What a help it must be to have someone to decide questions for one!’ After another pause of thought she looked up, saying, ‘I consent.’

‘No one with common-sense could hesitate!’ said M. Delys, as decidedly as if he himself always acted according to its dictates. ‘You will write to your uncle; Balmat will receive the letter at the Maison Crocq, and now all is settled.’

‘Yes,’ said Edmée, passing her hand over her eyes as if to efface some inward vision.

‘There was a marriage going on in the village,’ said M. Delys, hoping to find a more agreeable subject, a girl whom they called Mathurine Berthier, and a young fellow whose name has escaped me—’

‘Mathurine Berthier! the mayor’s daughter.’

‘A grand affair, I assure you; guns fired off on all sides, open house kept, everybody eating his fill and drinking to match, all the women crazy with envy at the number of *ors*’ (ornaments) ‘worn by the bride; her gold chains were beyond counting, rings, earrings—I daresay many an honest man’s fortune had been melted into them—all the villagers going and coming—’

‘That is just what I fancied my marriage would be,’ said Edmée, with a smile very like a sigh, and then she shrank and shivered, recalling in what strange circumstances it had really taken place; the terror, the fury, the shame, and the jests that overwhelmed her, and then the long night walk under stars dim with mist, the cold, yet kind attention of her young husband, while she could not find a word of answer, and then that wild temptation to fling herself into the stream which they crossed, and so make an end of all their difficulties. She even seemed to perceive the keen fragrance of the herbs on which they had trodden. Her hand closed on a chain of hair which hung around her neck, to which was suspended the golden cross that Balmat had spoken of; both were the

gift of Madame de St. Aignan. 'Mathurine could only have a civil marriage,' she said. 'Or would it be possible—?'

'To find a priest? I do not know. The bitter feeling against the priests is extraordinary—the peasants have got it into their heads that the Church joined hands with the nobles to oppress them, and you know how such a notion would spread and take root.'

'My poor mother! I have never been able to have a mass said for her soul—and now I ought'—Edmée stopped; she was thinking of Leroux. 'I could do that for him,' she added, as if relieved to find there were any filial duty possible to her.

M. Delys hemmed and made no answer. It was with great effort that Edmée added—

'Did you hear anything of a man called Letumier?'

'I suppose he got what he deserved, but it is a horrible story. In the day of victory one party is absolutely no better than another. In the first confusion after Robespierre's fall the aristocrats thought their turn was come. At Lyons every Jacobin who could be found was massacred—this Letumier was there; he was either thrown into the Rhone or perished in a prison which was set on fire in fact the blind fury of revenge was such that it seems many Royalists perished among the Jacobins. The two sons of the Duke of Orleans barely escaped massacre at Marseilles. Alas! what can we say about the deeds of the Republicans who had centuries of wrongs to avenge after this?'

Edmée drooped her head. She had no answer to make. 'It is all so terrible!' she murmured. 'But tell me many *émigrés* have returned, we know that; would it not be possible to have the name of M. de St. Aignan erased from the proscribed list? Have you tried?'

'I dare say more might be done. we will see,' answered M. Delys, with a guilty air, 'now let me paint, my child—we have talked enough.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ART PATRON.

‘WHAT have you there?’ asked M. Delys, as Edmée placed a small oil-painting in an advantageous position. ‘Where did that come from?’

‘It is Balmat’s. I asked him to let me have it. I was sure that you would allow me to have it here, where someone may see it; so many people come to your studio.’ M. Delys had one day in the week on which he admitted visitors to his studio. ‘He can never have a chance of selling any of his pictures otherwise. Look—I know that you will not care for it, you will say that he does not finish highly enough, but see, it has real merit.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said M. Delys, coming to examine the painting; ‘there is good quality there, honest work, the vine-trails on the wall are carefully done, and the colour of the leaves indicates the time of year very correctly, but I do not care for the sort of thing; a lovers’ quarrel—something which no doubt he saw in his Swiss village; the lad and lass have met by the fountain, and fallen out, and that is all!’

‘No, indeed, dear master, that is not all,’ argued Edmée, who, though sometimes shaken by the criticism which Balmat’s pictures always met with, was never long moved from her conviction that he had real talent. ‘It is really well composed, and a little tragi-comedy. See, the young man holds his pipe disconsolately, and sits awkward on the bench; he would make it up if he could, but is too clumsy to know how, while the girl stands, turning away, alert and angry, more with his awkwardness than because she was really vexed at first; she feels it so stupid of him not to speak and set all right. See how well her green jar is painted, and the clear water flowing through the hollow tree-trunk—then the brown old chalet, and bit of wall. It is very good, *mon maître!*’

While Edmée spoke there came a knock at the door, and, though it was not the day on which visitors were admitted, a stranger entered, on whose face the patronising customer was so plainly written that M. Delys muttered, ‘He comes in as if I kept a shop, and he had only to order so many yards of cloth!’ Sir, to what do I owe the honour of this visit?’

‘Monsieur, I have lately bought the Hôtel de Blanquefort.

... I am Guillaume Jobin, of whom you may have heard, Jobin and Co. are known as well or better than most *ci-devants*,' said the visitor, in a tone which implied serene assurance that he had but to name himself to be respectfully recognised.

'No, monsieur, I have not that advantage,' answered M. Delys, and Edmée could hardly suppress a smile at the effort which it cost him to utter even these words. A glance had told her that the citizen Jobin was precisely what the old artist most disliked, a rich and consequential bourgeois. She knew perfectly that the very way in which their visitor was looking round the atelier was intolerable to M. Delys, who muttered between his teeth, '*Nouveau riche!* would one not say that he was appraising every article of furniture? I have been in the Hôtel Blanquefort, monsieur, and had the happiness of knowing its former owner.'

'Ah, ah, its former owners will find it the Hôtel Jobin when they return, or rather if they return.'

'And why if, may I ask, monsieur? *émigrés* return every day now.'

'That depends on whether they can get their names *rayés*, my good sir. If anyone of weight think it better for the nation that they should stay away a little longer, why, the chances are that they do not find it altogether easy to gain permission. But that does not concern me. I bought the hôtel as *bien d'émigré*, and I keep it. I shall be delighted to see you there, monsieur, and have your advice about my pictures. It seems that there used to be a gallery of paintings there, and people have persuaded my wife and daughter that the walls look bare without them. I myself do not care; some pictures are pretty enough to look at, but bah! what good does your painting and your music and what people call art do anyone, I ask you? We are none the warmer, or the better governed, or the richer for that kind of thing; we sleep none the sounder, nor live the longer for it, but I want the Hôtel to look as it used; my wife desires it, and my daughter too,—women have their fancies, and I am willing to let them have their way, even if it cost something,' said M. Jobin, slapping his hand on his pocket, with a laugh which made M. Delys, already exasperated by the doctrines poured into his ears shrink up with disgust, and ask without turning to look at him, 'Monsieur, I still have to learn how I can serve you?'

‘Why, I want one of your paintings, to be sure! Pinard sent me here, he says they are the best that can be had, and when I buy a thing I like it of good quality; it answers in the end, and if one should wish to sell it, one gets one’s money back.’

‘Pinard sent you!’ growled M. Delys, in a voice which boded ill for the delinquent picture-dealer.

‘Yes, that is, he said your work was the best he knew, so I have come to see for myself.’

‘Did he not mention that visitors are only admitted to my atelier on *Décadi*!’

‘I believe he did, but I had no time to lose, and I never trust anyone to do what I can do for myself. That is the maxim which has made me a rich man, monsieur. So here I am, but there does not seem much to see,’ added M. Jobin, looking round with some doubt and disappointment. ‘You do not keep specimens hanging up then? I thought I should see a number of your works hanging up, and take my choice. I know nothing of art, I have had more important things to think of, but I know what I like—one does not need much teaching to understand that, and since I pay I have a right to have it. So, my dear monsieur, when you set about a painting for me—’

‘Excuse me, monsieur, my time is fully occupied, I am already beset with more commissions than I know how to execute. *Imbecile, va!* even when I was poorest I would have broken my brush sooner than paint for thee!’ muttered the old man, his very eyebrows bristling with wrath.

‘But monsieur—’

‘My time is promised, monsieur, promised!’

‘But I have made up my mind to have one of your flower pieces, since Pinard tells me—’

‘Pinard is a fool! he knows perfectly well that if I had as many hands as Briareus I could not get through what I have to do in the next three years!’

‘But you must have something done, or which could be painted in a week or two, monsieur!’

‘A week or two!’ repeated M. Delys. “‘*Je dis qu’il est un sot, mais c’est lui qui le prouve!*”’

‘Monsieur probably does not know how long such a painting as he desires takes to execute,’ interposed Edmée, anxious to stifle the quotation, which she had recognised at

the first words. 'See, this leaf would take my father a day.'

'*Ma foi!* if that is necessary your painting may well be dear! It is true that your time is not so valuable as that of a business man. What a singular way of spending one's life, to daub colours on a piece of canvas! and all to copy things which we can see anywhere without paying for them! It seems droll when one thinks of it. But, mademoiselle—' he had hitherto paid no attention to Edmée—' Since you are monsieur's daughter your name is also Lafleur! Then a picture of yours would be equally valuable, since it would have the same signature. All I want is to have something signed Lafleur in my gallery.'

'I am afraid, monsieur, that connoisseurs would soon discover the difference between my father's pictures and mine, and besides I am fully occupied,' said Edmée, with great difficulty suppressin her amusement at this view of the matter, all the more that she heard a succession of angry snorts from M. Delys, as he sat with his back turned to them. 'But here is a painting by an artist full of promise,' and she rose to point out and explain the picture of Balmat.

'It is not then done by either of you,' said citizen Jobin, on which a still angrier grunt escaped M. Delys, who was making believe to be engrossed in his work, but in reality far too much perturbed to attempt a stroke.

'No, monsieur, we only paint flowers, but see how well this is done; does it not recall some of Chardin's scenes, or Greuze? You understand the story of it, I am sure,' and the charming grace with which she explained the *motif* of the picture mollified even M. Delys, and made the would-be patron listen with interest. She thought that she had secured him as a purchaser, until he said, 'After all it seems that this young man is unknown; how is one to be sure that his works are worth anything?'

'Ask M. Pinard, anyone, monsieur! You will have had the honour of discovering merit. Besides, you like this, and you said yourself that was the true test.'

'*Ma foi!* yes, but still one does not like to risk anything. If one had ever heard his name. Then you will not paint anything for me, monsieur?'

'No, monsieur,' answered M. Delys, curtly.

'Monsieur, who is a business man, would not wish us to

enter on engagements which we could not meet,' said Edmée. 'We artists have also our honour.'

'Upon my word, mademoiselle, you speak well! Do you know, dear monsieur, you have a charming daughter? Well, I must try elsewhere. Your servant, mademoiselle,' and so he bowed himself out, and had scarcely closed the door when M. Delys flung his brush from him in a transport of indignation, and starting up stamped about the atelier, clutching his wig in one hand, and making threatening gestures with the other. 'Animal! imbecile! does he think I will profane my brush to do a stroke for him, or thine either? Dolt of a Pinard, what right had he to name me to such a fellow as this? what art thou laughing at?' he exclaimed, stopping suddenly before Edmée, and regarding her fiercely. 'What, because I am an artist is it allowed to every idiot with money in his purse to enter my atelier, waste my time, weary my ears with his senseless talk, and presume to patronise me? A vulgar fellow who would think a map and a landscape all the same, who considers art a toy fit perhaps for silly women! You are laughing still!'

'Dear master, whose fault is that? But you were terribly rude, do you know?'

'I am glad of it, I am glad of it!' and then, beginning to calm down, he replaced his wig, and said, 'After all it is I who am a fool to let such a poor creature disturb me, but he must have been very insupportable, since he could thus annoy a calm, moderate man like me'—Edmée's smile was wicked, but he did not detect it—'the worst of it is that he has so tried my nerves that my morning is lost. It is useless to try to paint.'

'I wish he would have bought poor Balmat's picture,' said Edmée, regretfully.

'Child, if you believe that sketch to have any merit, rejoice that it has not fallen into such hands!'

'Ah, but worthier eyes would have seen it in his gallery, and Balmat would have been so thankful for the money! It seems very difficult to begin to sell one's pictures, unless indeed one be as fortunate as I; mine are accepted at once, as your pupil's.'

'On their own merits, too, dear child,' interrupted M. Delys, who was as jealous for her reputation as for his own. 'But it is hard, very hard, to make a beginning. I ought to

know it, for it was years before I sold one. Other artists had friends, got a commission from Government—no luck came my way. I had to live on a crust, but I had no family and wanted little; I could do it, and I did. Poor Balmat! he is only at the beginning of his difficulties.'

'I tell him to remember that David tried five times for the *Grand Prix de Rome*.'

'He makes progress, he certainly does; he is no longer a *rapin*. No,' said M. Delys, using the familiar word applied not only to new comers in a studio, but to those who after a time give little promise of ultimate success. 'How the poor lad must have worked! It is not what I like—no, but there is great merit.'

'Ah! you own it now, dear master!' cried Edmée, triumphantly. 'That M. Jobin would have done well to take it, would he not?' Then, with an effort, 'Did you observe what he said about the former owners of the Hôtel de Blanquefort? their return?'

'That was one of the very things which made me dislike the fellow. The old owners were true aristocrats; I like a real aristocrat—always did.'

'It seems that returning or not returning is a matter of favour?'

'So it would appear.'

'And if anyone find it his interest to prevent an *émigré's* return, it can be effectually hindered.'

'Yes, that complicates matters,' said M. Delys, understanding with the quickness of affection whither her thoughts were tending.

'But, after all it seems such vanity to suppose M. de Pelven remembers me,' murmured Edmée, blushing crimson, as she alluded to a subject which had hitherto been only tacitly understood between them.

'He remembers Yes, he remembers,' answered the old painter, brusquely. 'I have learned all I could about him—cautiously, you know, cautiously; and it seems he never lets go any plot or plan. He is quiet enough now; perhaps he finds little to do under the Directory, or is watching the times; but he is a dangerous man. It seems that that silly fellow Isnard presumed to act spy upon him
. well, he has disappeared.'

'Disappeared!'

‘Even so; no doubt he is now inside some prison, or even on his way to Cayenne, with the last batch of *déportés*.’

‘Is it possible that Isnard should have ever thought of measuring himself with De Pelve!’

‘You have had no answer yet from the uncle Grabian?’

‘No—it will come soon enough,’ answered Edmée, with that clouded look which any mention of her old life always brought, and M. Delys took up his brush, and said no more. It seemed however as if what he had said had conjured up the expected letter from Edmée’s uncle, for a few days afterwards it arrived, giving such information as enabled her to enter on possession of Leroux’s money. But of the title-deeds of St. Aignan there was not a word. Apparently they were not among Leroux’s hoards, and Edmée was keenly, feverishly disappointed. Some gladness however her money brought her. She knew how much Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had regretted her little property at Mortemart, and had long hoped to earn enough by her painting to buy it back. It had found no purchaser; houses were less in request than land. M. Delys entered with delight into the scheme, and insisted on helping in every part of it, quite unaware how much he embarrassed Edmée by his inexperience in all practical matters, and his susceptibility if he suspected he was not indispensable. It was a great satisfaction to him that the business had to be carried on in his name, as it would not have been prudent to let that of an aristocrat appear in it; and he was happily convinced that it was entirely owing to his good management that Edmée was at last able to offer the papers which gave possession of the house and garden to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, who was touched even to tears. She had not shed one over their troubles, but they overflowed in this moment of surprise and pleasure. She began immediately to make schemes for re-visiting Mortemart, and her movements were precipitated by news which at first sight might have rather appeared calculated to detain her in Paris.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN THE ATELIER.

‘ALREADY? You are going already?’ said M. Delys, as Edmée moved from her easel.

‘You do not know how late it is, dear master. My aunt will wonder where I am. The day would seem long to her if I did not give her an hour or two in the afternoon now that she has not her *ménage* to look after, as at Mortemart, and no visits to pay.’

‘Yes, I suppose women do find a pleasure in paying visits,’ said M. Delys, shrugging his shoulders

‘And some men also, *mon maître*.’

‘Yes, some men, as you say. It used to seem the chief occupation formerly of those amphibious creatures, the abbés, men made to swim in the shallows of aristocracy, always haunting salons—the indispensables, as they were called—or of such soldiers as I remember seeing sometimes in the Blanquefort salons, that hôtel which that common fellow said he had bought when he came here a while ago—’

‘Yes, I recollect,’ said Edmée, amused at the vindictiveness with which M. Delys still spoke of citizen Jobin.

‘The young Comtesse was charming, it was her mother-in-law who encouraged the swarm of idlers. I tell you I have seen a colonel and a captain enter together, each with a reticule by his side, and each take out a gold needle with which one began to embroider a flounce which the Dowager Countess had in hand, and the other worked at her tambour frame, and better than she did—better than she did herself!—But why need you go to your aunt so early?’

‘It is my usual time; I hardly see her of an evening, so many people come to her soirées, and besides I like reading to her; I should be sorry to be nothing but a painter.’

M. Delys grunted, and she saw that his susceptibility was wounded.

‘It is not as if I were a man,’ she continued; ‘a man’s life is a sort of education, but a woman must learn from books.’

‘There is something in that,’ said M. Delys, mollified; ‘and if it be for your own pleasure I have nothing to say, but if it be for Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s, who is perfectly

able to amuse herself, and has no conception of the devotion required by art, I grudge the time.'

'I know you do, dear master,' said Edmée, with a smile, for it was not easy to divide herself in two so as to content her two best friends, each of whom was unwilling to spare her to the other. 'But I paint better for a change of thought, and I had so little time to learn anything as a child; after marraine died—you know what pains she took with me as long as she lived—no one taught me anything.'

'Who is there? am I never to have a moment's peace? nothing but interruptions from morning to evening!' exclaimed M. Delys, ungratefully oblivious of the long hours during which no one had disturbed him.

'It is only Balmat, *mon maître*. Why, Balmat, what has happened? You look as if you had rubbed your face against the sun! I declare you are an inch taller.'

'That is because I have had a great privilege,' said Balmat, as he closed the door noiselessly, well aware how any loud or unexpected sound jarred on the sensitive nerves of the old painter. 'I have been in the Atelier des Sabines!'

'What! what!' exclaimed M. Delys, turning sharply. 'You! David has allowed you to see his picture?'

'You have been in the Atelier des Sabines!' cried Edmée, with great interest, for the celebrated picture which David was known to have in hand in the great garret which had been allotted to his use for that purpose in the Louvre had been seen by very few, and in the art-loving world it was a matter of great curiosity and excitement. Balmat had to give a minute account of the studio itself, of the sketches which David had made for his picture, and of the moment which he had selected in the history of the Sabine women carried off by the Romans.

'I saw David at work, he was sketching in the figure of a child, one of a group,' Balmat said, in a low voice, as if still under the impression of awe-struck joy and gratitude which had made his heart beat fast when he found himself in those honoured precincts. 'Franque, whom he allows to help him, was at work too. I cannot say how grand the figure of Tatius is! The only thing I dare question is his decision to make all the figures nude, and the horses without curb or rein. But it is magnificent, and will be thought more, not less so in the days to come!'

M. Delys was always as curious as a child about

anything which caught his attention, and like a child, loved to obtain the minutest details regarding it, though utterly impatient of whatever lay without the circle of his interests, and it was not for some time that Edmée could enquire, 'How came you to be so favoured, Jacques?'

Balmat coloured like a girl.

'He—You know he always did say I could draw, and he values that immensely; his teaching is founded on correct drawing. A sketch of mine pleased him; he had told us all to draw some group or single figure, which might be useful to him in this picture. We laughed, but he was serious. Ah, you do not know how truly modest David is! only his pupils do know it. He repeated that he would do his best to use anything of merit which we could produce—we have tried the sort of thing often before, but never with such a hope. And mine pleased him.'

'Oh, Jacques, how glad I am!' exclaimed Edmée, holding out her hand, with a dew of gladness in her sweet eyes.

'David used a sketch of yours!' said M. Delys, with undisguised astonishment.

'*Mon maître!* you did not need that to assure you how well Balmat draws! You are as bad as M. Jobin himself!' said Edmée, reproachfully.

'So I am, child, so I am,' answered M. Delys, with a gesture of vexation. 'But see you—somehow I never understood it thoroughly. David is going to introduce a sketch of yours in the Sabines!'

For the first time Balmat seemed to him something more than an excellent young Swiss, slow in manners and tongue; he had not liked the naturalistic style of his paintings, and prejudice had really until now blinded him to their merit. It was a sharp lesson to Edmée on how hard it was to win a name, or make merit recognised without one.

'I must tell you that after all the attitude of my figure was only one which I once saw a model take involuntarily when tired of posing,' said Balmat, with the old look which Edmée knew so well. 'I recollected it, and knew it afterwards.'

'Can you do that?' asked M. Delys with interest. Everything which Balmat did was worth hearing now, since David thought so well of his talent as to employ an idea of his in the Sabines.

‘Certainly. From a child I have had the habit of looking carefully at things, and reproducing them from memory—you may imagine I could not run and draw every time I wished it at home!’

‘I should know anywhere that you were an artist,’ said Edmée, looking at the honest Swiss face, redeemed from homeliness by the clear, observant look to which she alluded, ‘You see things. What a good face it is too!’ she added inwardly. ‘Why, Jacques, everyone will want to see you; you will be questioned as if you had been to unknown lands! and—though I think people might see their merit for themselves—surely this will help to sell your pictures?’

‘How so?’

‘Why, when it is known that David thought so highly of you——’

‘How should it be known? No one will hear of it outside of the atelier, and you do not suppose, I imagine, that I shall go about announcing it?’

Edmée was silent, but M. Delys exclaimed, ‘You will be a fool if you do not, my lad. Do you suppose that if such a thing had happened to Franque, or Richard, or Robin, they would not have announced it to all the four winds, and made a fortune out of it?’

‘I cannot say, but it is not my way,’ answered Balmat, quietly, and Edmée resolved to learn the fact afresh from Franque, who often came to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan’s salon, so as to use it for Balmat’s benefit, without breach of confidence, but she knew that she must be cautious. All the other men whom she knew would have taken it as a matter of course to use interest and influence, and get on by worshipping whatever star was in the ascendant, even if its beams were none of the purest; but none of all this was possible to Balmat. ‘He is a Swiss, you see!’ Mademoiselle de St. Aignan would say, in explanation of some such perplexing fact, and such as it was the explanation was undeniable. Thinking of someone very unlike him made Edmée ask, ‘You have heard nothing of Isnard?’

‘Nothing. It is very strange. He must have got into some scrape.’

‘That is exceedingly likely,’ said M. Delys. ‘How he kept his head on in ’93 and ’94 I cannot imagine, except that it was so empty that no one would have it, but it seems rather

hard to lose it now. Since the five kings of France have sat on their curule chairs, with their flesh-coloured breeches and regal mantles'—M. Delys was always disrespectful and spiteful to the Directory—'we have had a sort of truce, but Heaven only knows what any day may bring!'

'It is a good sign that letters come now with less delay, and seem less often examined,' said Balmat, and there was something in his voice which made Edmée look quickly at him. 'Yes,' he said, as if in answer to her unspoken question, 'I have heard from Dubois, he who did not gain the *grand prix*,' added Balmat, in explanation to M. Delys, 'but has gone nevertheless to study at Rome. I had told him that I had reason to believe a friend of mine was in Italy, studying painting, and bade him send me word if he heard anything, and it seems he has met with someone who knows St. Aignan well.'

'*Imbécile!* what need was there to meddle in the matter?' growled M. Delys aside, as he saw his vague hopes that nothing would be heard of Alain dashed to the ground. Edmée was too much moved to smile at this self-betrayal.

'Why has he never tried to come home when so many have returned?' she asked, in an unsteady voice.

'It seems that he has tried to have his name *rayé*, and was assured not only that it was hopeless, but that to draw attention to his emigration might endanger any of his family still in France.'

'Who told him that?'

'As far as I can understand—Dubois himself had not met him, you know—it was M. de Pelven.'

'I knew it!' said Edmée, turning pale. 'Am I always to stand between him and happiness?'

'We must overcome these difficulties. The Count is an artist; we must get David to obtain permission for him to return.'

'Impossible! he would never accept a favour from a regicide.'

'You speak like a silly child,' interrupted M. Delys, all the more sharply that he felt not only irritable, but guilty. He will only see in David the painter who has regenerated art in France. He may even wish to be his pupil. Let me see: David has but few in his atelier just now; Gros is leaving it; Gérard is working independently—have you seen

his Psyche, Balmat? Suppose I try what David says to it?’

‘Try, dear master. You have told me all you know, Jacques? Then promise me, both of you, to say nothing to my aunt. Ah, you know how reluctant I am to delay the joy which she would feel in learning that he is safe, may soon return; but you know too how she would try to prevent my giving him his liberty. Only let me see him, let me speak to him, and settle that, and then I will have the delight of saying that he has come back.’

‘Stop, child, you must do as you like, but as to giving him his liberty, as you choose to call it, I absolutely refuse to help you in that matter.’

‘Ah, that is not necessary. I can act for myself in this. You promise too, Jacques?’

‘No one has a right to interfere, but I am sorry for your resolution,’ answered Balmat, gravely, his instinct of law and duty ranging itself against her determination, but his conviction that each individual must be free to act according to his conscience withholding him from further interference.

‘He must not return to bondage!—Hush, there is my aunt; she cannot understand what has delayed me.’

The high heels were tripping down the stairs, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan appeared to demand whether Edmée had forgotten the hour.

‘And I am dying to know what there is in this packet which the nephew of Madelon Crocq has brought for Balmat, but it comes from St. Aignan, and is therefore doubtless from your uncle, and for you, *ma belle*,’ said she, handing over a packet to Edmée, who took it with the uncontrollable reluctance with which she always encountered anything connected with St. Aignan. She stood reading a letter which she found within it, and her face betrayed unusual emotion.

‘My uncle has sent me some papers, found under a board in our old house,’ she said, seeing general attention attracted to her. ‘He thought I had better have them, though they do not belong to me,’ and she fastened them up with a manifest intention of giving no further explanation. It was never easy for anyone, even Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, to question Edmée, when she did not choose it, and M. Delys and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could only exchange enquiring and meaning looks.

‘This good man of an uncle looks after your interests, it

seems. Our friend here made a journey worth taking when he gave up so much of his valuable time on your behalf, *ma charmante*.'

'Mademoiselle, I am very glad to have served this child, but as you know my journey had another object. As for the uncle, he appeared rather fond of our little girl—an odd thing, is it not? and besides I fancy him not ill-pleased to have a niece who is a Countess, Republican though he be.'

'Let me tell you that real Republicans are very rare creatures, dear monsieur. There must be some, somewhere, but only once in a hundred years. Such a one is liberal enough in theory, but in practice he would throw his slaves to the lampreys, all of course to benefit the human race. And do you think I don't know that those democratic pupils of David's show a certain respect to rank? that M. de Forbin is looked up to because he is a man of good birth, though they cut off the *De* and ignore his title? *Allez*, I am a better Republican than any of them, including David himself, for he bears a grudge to all nobly born, while I care nothing whether a man be a duke or a charcoal-burner, so long as he is witty and agreeable.'

'Ah, dear aunt, an aristocrat like you cannot possibly understand how much easier it is for you to feel thus than for one of low birth!' said Edmée, making an effort to join in the conversation.

'Come in then! Let everyone in the Louvre come in by all means,' said M. Delys, exasperated, as a fresh knock came at the door. One of David's pupils entered, in classic costume, white tunic and sandals. He bowed with an embarrassed air to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, trying to look as if he had not heard the '*Juste ciel!*' which escaped her lips at the sight of him.

'I hope you are not busy, monsieur,' he said; 'I want you to help some of us who have got into difficulties.'

'I never help anyone, and I dare say it is no more than you deserved. Busy!—how should I be busy at this rate? Is this my atelier or not?'

'What has happened, Ducis?' interposed Balmat.

'What always happens when a man dares to have an ideal, a system too lofty for the common herd. You know that we have long felt that a living, visible protestation against modern costume, modern customs was absolutely necessary; we have attempted it singly for several years—'

‘Why, it was you, monsieur, whom I remarked the first day I was in Paris!’ cried Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, suddenly recollecting the apparition which had so amazed her.

‘Madame!’ Ducis bowed, evidently flattered. ‘Now the number of those who think thus is greatly increased; we have banded together, and determined to teach the populace by the eye, and induce it to return to primitive habits of thought and life——.’

‘Good heavens, think of the climate!’ exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. ‘*Some* costume surely is advisable?’

Ducis looked at her with austere reproach. His enthusiasm was too genuine to be shaken, but he felt regret for her blinded state of mind.

‘Yes, yes, I know all that; Quai has often deafened me with it,’ said M. Delys. ‘Is *he* in trouble?’

‘No, but some who feel that even Maurice Quai does not fully carry out our principles resolved to live in the forests and lead a primeval life. They had just cut down a tree to make a fire, when the gardes arrested them, took them to prison——’

‘That is serious,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, enchanted by this denouement.

‘That is not the worst, madame!’

‘But what then, monsieur? you alarm me.’

‘They cut their hair!’ said Ducis, tragically. ‘You laugh, madame, but long hair was one of the signs of our sect; in itself it was a protestation against that barbarous thing called fashion.’

‘I suppose that they cannot be released until someone of sufficient standing vouches for their patriotism,’ said Balmat.

‘And you imagine that I will mix myself up with this ridiculous business?’ cried M. Delys. ‘Go and ask David; they are his pupils, not mine, thank Heaven!’

‘He is opposed to our sect, as you know.’

‘I tell you I will have nothing to do with it. A set of fools and madmen!’

Ducis turned to Balmat, and exchanged a few words unheard, then, bowing, withdrew. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan burst into hearty laughter, which infected her companions. ‘Will you explain M. Ducis’ costume?’ she asked, as soon as she could speak.

‘A very good fellow; it is only his way of protesting

against the gross and cumbersome ugliness of common life ; everyone ought to do the same,' said M. Delys, whom nothing would have induced to exchange his neat and *soigné* costume for any tunic ever woven.

'*Bon !* at all events it *is* a costume, while David wants, by what I hear of his Sabines, to teach us to do without one altogether,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. 'I suppose he thinks when we come to that we shall believe ourselves in Paradise. No, never shall I get used to the idea of people walking about my poor Paris dressed like Greeks, and calling themselves Agamemnon and Aristides ! Balmat, bring Ducis this evening.'

'His costume is not more extraordinary than those of half-a-dozen years ago,' retorted M. Delys, who was in one of his most contradictory moods. 'I have seen ladies kneeling in their carriages with their heads out of window, because their coiffures were so high that they could not sit upright !'

'Ah bah ! you do not know a work of art when you see it. Good-bye, *ma petite*, it is not worth while to begin our reading now ; M. Delys will give me his arm.'

The narrow staircase forbade much show of gallantry, but when they were at the top Mademoiselle de St. Aignan placed herself between her companion and the stairs, barring all chance of escape for him, lifted her finger and said, 'Now tell me what you have heard of my nephew. Don't deny it ; you have news. Do you think I do not know that child's face, and you yourself have a guilty look.'

'But, mademoiselle,' began M. Delys, deprecatingly, and looking round with an evident intention of flight. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan instantly seized him by his ruffle, and held him captive.

'Don't talk to me of buts ; you know that your flowers are fading in the atelier ; it is nearly noon, and I have often heard you say that between noon and four o'clock no good work is ever done ; nature is at rest ; the sun's rays are at an angle unfavourable to creation—is it not so ? Exactly. Well then, instead of losing precious time, speak out.'

Thus adjured, M. Delys spoke, not sorry to be obliged to do so.

'Listen, my old friend,' she answered, after a pause of reflection, 'my heart beats with joy at the thought of seeing my nephew again, but I have waited nearly four years ; I

can wait a little longer. Do not speak to him of me ; let him see Edmée without knowing her ; take him to your atelier.'

'But he will recognise her, and you know her fixed resolution.'

'Then tell him where I am. I shall go to visit my little domain at Mortemart. But I fancy she will find it more difficult than she thinks to tell him he is free. Let us gain time, and mind that she does not discover how basely you have betrayed all this to me. Oh yes, it was very base, but we all know you are too good-natured to refuse anything asked of you. *Fi donc!* would you pretend that you are not good-natured? Now what can be the use of denying what everyone knows? Adieu, my good friend, go and release the captives.'

It must have been sheer bewilderment at these unjust accusations which upset all M. Delys' resolves, as expressed to Ducis, for after a gesture of despair he went off to see what could be done for the unlucky 'penseurs,' without there being any need for the mediation of Balmat, who was awaiting his return in the atelier. 'How you have improved!' he said to Edmée, looking at the flower-piece on which she had been engaged.

'Yes, so Redouté said,' she answered, indifferently, though the praises of Redouté, whose celebrity as a flower-painter was European, had only the day before thrilled her with delight.

'You do not seem to care!'

'No, not just now,' said Edmée, for the first time feeling as if her art were unsatisfying, and startled by some inward voice which asked what, should that fail her, she had left to fill her life?

'Yes, you make great progress, and you have worked for it. How beautiful these flowers are! I came on a verse of a Psalm to-day which seemed meant for you: "Thou hast made me glad through Thy works."'

'Ah, you have your Bible; no one can take that from you, for if you were deprived of the book, it is in your heart. But I seem to have lost everything—no altar, no priest, no holy days! How can any good come to a country which has denied its God?'

'There is a rumour that the churches may be soon reopened.'

'Oh, Jacques!' and Edmée stood with clasped hands, quite silent. When she looked up, it was to say, 'Will you

take care of these for me, Jacques? It is strange they and your news from Rome should come together. I will tell you another time what to do with them.

Balmat took the packet without a question.

'You are the best friend anyone ever had,' she said, gratefully. 'Perhaps, after all, things may turn out better than one expected.'

Balmat stood watching her while she resumed her painting. With his own exquisite pleasure in David's praise still fresh, he could not understand her apparent indifference to that of Redouté, no less famous in his own line than was the historical painter in his. He thought in his humility that it was only because the encouragement came after long, almost nopeless waiting that it was so sweet; perhaps to Edmée, whose path in art as well as her canvas had been strewn with roses, it seemed less valuable. But Balmat had not discovered the true explanation. He felt as a man, and loved art for itself; Edmée was an artist, but even more a woman, and her restless heart waking up cared little for what only concerned the mind. How wildly it could beat she had yet to learn; her dawning liking for De Pelven, struck dead almost before she was conscious of it, had not revealed it, but she trembled already, like an Undine aware that some new, unknown, all-powerful force was about to possess her. Balmat comprehended her mood enough to leave her in peace, and they parted with only a mute sign of farewell when he found he could wait no longer for the return of M. Delys. He guessed that the old man was taking measures for the release of the 'penseurs,' and accordingly a couple of days later they reappeared in the atelier, to be welcomed with many un pitying jests. They brought some news with them; one of them had discovered the tenant of the next cell to be Isnard, the vanished Isnard. They had been able to communicate sufficiently for Isnard to declare that he had neither been tried nor could learn on what charge he was detained. He was no great favourite in the atelier, where his moody vanity made him a butt who did not always respond harmlessly to the raillery spared to no one, but that a pupil of David's should be thus in durance vile roused a storm of indignation, and various plans were formed to obtain his freedom, none of which when put to the proof seemed very hopeful. David did not take up the cause warmly, and none of the pupils

happened to know a member of the Directory. It was however already something gained that they knew where Isnard was, and unless something should occur to put him out of their heads, there was a fair chance in these changing days that one or another would discover some key to his prison door.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOPES AND FEARS.

THE Republican painter Louis David had an embarrassing past which he would fain have forgotten, and persuaded others to forget. He was a man who, with a cold heart and but little imagination, was yet rapidly carried away by the impression of the moment, and at one time admired Marat and Jacobinism as unreasoningly as he afterwards did the genius and the tyranny of Napoleon. He could scarcely be called inconsistent, for he had never possessed any fixed principles. Under the Directory, and with the recollection of those long, gloomy months spent in prison, with death hanging over him, his revolutionary fever altogether cooled, and when released and again popular, he willingly threw his ægis over any Royalist who would accept his protection. Balmat's appeal on behalf of the young Comte de St. Aignan was readily listened to ; so changed were David's feelings that the aristocratic name alone spoke in the owner's favour, though Balmat explained that his friend was of a family so distantly related to the Duc de St. Aignan that the connection could scarcely be traced, and David unhesitatingly promised to use his influence in enabling Alain to return without danger. Some exiles had boldly returned without waiting for the ceremony of having their names struck off the fatal list which doomed them to death, but it was a hazardous step, and one not to be thought of in Alain's case, where there was a dangerous enemy in the background. With some difficulty M. Delys had been induced to let Balmat negotiate the matter instead of appearing in it himself, lest De Pelven, hearing that someone was moving on Alain's behalf, should make enquiries, and so come on Edmée's track. Her nervous

fear of him was invincible, though she knew that in these changed and calmer times he could scarcely place her in actual danger. The sense of his power and of his will to harm her and those whom she loved had so strongly impressed her that she shrank from his very name, independent of the shame and anger which it awoke from other causes.

A new and unforeseen difficulty appeared when the question arose as to where Alain was. They knew that he had been in England, they had heard of him in Italy, but had no clue to his actual whereabouts. Balmat did not think this an insuperable obstacle. There was a freemasonry among artists, he said, which would sooner or later enable him to find out where Alain was, and he set enquiries on foot at once, through his friend in Rome, with a certainty that he should soon learn what he desired, which communicated itself to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan and to Edmée, in whom it woke a tumult of feeling which amazed and frightened her, and made it so difficult to find that absorbing delight in her art which had never before failed her as to keep before her the doubt, repelled with vain impatience, as to whether art alone would suffice to fill her heart and life. 'If things were once settled—if he had come and it were all done with, I should feel as I used,' she would repeat to herself, the more vehemently that all the time she knew that never again should she feel as she had once done, never know any more exactly that happy peacefulness which had entered her heart in the first days which she spent in the *Atelier du Lys*, nor lead the calm, unawakened life which had then fully contented her. Joy might crown her; anguish might smite her like a sword; hard-won resignation might be hers in the end, or weariness of all things ape its likeness, and bid her believe that exemption from suffering was happiness, but the girlish life of 'maiden meditation, fancy free,' had unawares slipped away from her for ever. She made little outward show of expectation or interest, but there was a fitful flush on her cheek, a wistful look in her eyes which betrayed the troubled feelings that found no outward vent. Even in her dreams she was pursued by visions of Alain's suddenly entering the atelier, and recognising her with astonishment—perhaps repugnance. She pictured the scene, waking and sleeping, in so many ways that she believed herself prepared for everything which could possibly happen, forgetting that

the only thing which can be safely reckoned upon is the *imprévu*.

On the other hand, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan made no secret of her eager hopes, and the impatience with which she was awaiting news of her nephew. She would not talk over her feelings with Balmat, who was only a watchmaker's son, and moreover scarcely a proper confidant for her perplexities as to the tie between Edmée and Alain, but she seized on M. Delys whenever she could, and exasperated him beyond belief with them, indifferent to the palpable fact that his chief desire was to ignore Alain, and hear and see nothing of this disturbing element in a life which to him, at all events, was perfectly satisfactory.

'Everything is upside down,' she would say; 'there has been a *branle générale*, but still some day we shall have the old ways back,' and she spoke with a settled conviction which made M. Delys shrug his shoulders, forgetting that so strong a conviction on the part of many units would go far to bring anything to pass. 'One really does not know what to expect now-a-days, but in our time no one ever supposed there could be any strong feeling between husband and wife. It would have been bad taste; how could they have given full attention to entertaining their guests if they had been occupied with each other? No one can be agreeable who is preoccupied, as I have frequently told that child Edmée. My brother rarely saw his wife; he had his office about Court, and when she was at Versailles she had her guests to attend to, he, his. Yet they were happy enough. But I do not know whether such a life would content Edmée. She is romantic; she belongs to her time.'

'Madame la Comtesse loved her children. She was a devoted mother.'

'True, but until Jean Jacques and the reign of nature it was considered to be rather *bourgeois*. My brother was displeased that she spent so much time at St. Aignan while the Chevalier was young, but she persisted. I think that she felt her eldest son had been too much left to lacqueys, for really the governor whom his father chose for him was little else. My brother wished her to live at Versailles; he hoped to advance his fortunes through her. Everything was possible to a beautiful woman who would flatter and beg; who could be so uncivil as to refuse her requests? She could gain

abbeys, bishoprics, pensions for all her family by a smile and a compliment.'

'That was not the *métier* in which Madame la Comtesse excelled,' said M. Delys. 'She could do all things admirably but this.'

'And she had an unaccountable aversion to living in public and seeking favours. There was a touch of Jansenism in her family, you know, a something rigid which one always detected, a *frondeur* spirit; it is only the true ancient noblesse which breathes in courts as its native atmosphere.'

M. Delys grunted; the implied criticism on Madame de St. Aignan made him for the time almost democratic.

'But if I could only divine what my nephew's wishes are,' pursued Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, all unconscious of the semi-conversion which she had unintentionally effected, 'I should be more at ease.'

'As for me I am more and more convinced, mademoiselle, that he had much better set her free.'

'But does the child wish it?'

'Wish it? wish it? We all know that she does.'

'I know nothing of the sort,' answered Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, decisively.

It was a new and highly unwelcome idea to M. Delys, who had a little castle of the air of his own, which he meant to inhabit with Edmée when this troublesome episode should be past, and he strove against it, but it would not be driven away, and his affection for his adopted child making him unusually clear-sighted, his wishes could not long blind him to the perception that it was for Alain's sake and not her own that she sought to dissolve the tie between them. Once admitted, this discovery altered all his views and plans, but at first he declined to receive it, and virulently opposed whatever Mademoiselle de St. Aignan advanced during all the rest of the conversation, pitiless of her anxieties, which were really great. She loved Edmée, wished to secure her happiness, and pardoned her plebeian origin, but could not persuade herself that Alain would or could accept, unless at the cold command of honour, a wife so unlike those great ladies whom she had been accustomed to look upon as models. She thought of some whom she had seen when in Paris in former days, with their stately graciousness, their airy talk, their habit of society from earliest years, trained to express by a

bend or curtsey exactly the shade of politeness due to a superior or an equal ; to an inferior or to someone who had not ' les grandes et les petites entreées ; ' to her who had been ennobled, or to another who, high-born herself, had married a degree below her own station. She recalled charming ladies who in half-a-year would spend seventy thousand francs more than their whole twelvemonths' income, and would have felt it ' bourgeois ' to think twice about it ; who owed sixty thousand francs to their shoemaker, and as much more to every one of their other ' fournisseurs,' and smiled none the less serenely, and received their guests none the less gaily. Edmée was unlike any of these, who had been the ideals of what a great lady should be, up to the time when the flood came and swept them all away. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan would not have wished to change her in any respect, as far as she herself was concerned ; she saw in her a charming, pure-minded girl, sweeter, more innocent a thousand times than these, but when in fancy she looked through Alain's eyes she grew critical and uneasy, and could not believe that he would be satisfied. And, in spite of the ordinary relations between husband and wife in her own rank which she had only too truly described, she could not reconcile herself to a mere *mariage de convenance* for Edmée, nor divest herself of the conviction that in such a case the girl would be boundlessly miserable, whatever Alain might be ; a man, of course, would find ways and means of consoling himself, but what would remain for his wife, if that wife were Edmée ? and yet still more unpleasant was the thought of breaking the bond altogether. Edmée had deserved better things at their hands than this. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan really believed herself a Liberal, and compared to most of her class, was so, and yet, unconsciously, she thought that to bear the name of St. Aignan was a recompense, due indeed, but sufficient, for the self-devotion which Edmée had shown through all these years.

Her nephew's future, too, was a vast perplexity to her. ' How is he to live ? Even if he get the St. Aignan title-deeds back—and I fully believe that the child has them—he is a poor man,' she would argue. ' All his mother's property is completely, irretrievably lost to us, and my brother had, I know, heavy debts and mortgages on his own. And suppose he could return to the château, with or without Edmée, it would be an inexpressibly thorny position

‘If he have any turn for art, he must live by that, I suppose,’ said M. Delys, peevishly, for the idea of making art a mere profession by which to gain money was peculiarly distasteful to him.

‘But that is out of the question ! It would be enough to make his father return from his grave ! Once, at St. Aignan, when by some strange chance he visited the Chevalier’s apartment, and found him painting, I well remember with what anger he flung the brushes and palette out of the window, exclaiming, “When one is called St. Aignan, monsieur, one does not—” but it is not worth repeating,’ she added hastily, as she recollected that she was speaking to an artist. M. Delys, however, was not in the least offended. The feeling which she described was too entirely natural among the noblesse for him to dream of being annoyed. He took it as a matter of course.

‘I am weary of it all, I tell you,’ she added ; ‘I shall go next month and visit my dear old house at Mortemart. I am not fit for Paris life ; I am a provinciale ; my health is as unpardonably good as if I were a *dame de la halle* ; I never have a headache or the least touch of the *vapeurs* ; I am only adapted for country life. Besides, I am longing to see how my little property has fared ; it seems ten years since I left Mortemart. I shall make arrangements for going there.’

M. Delys had no objection to make. In his heart he wished her away, for while she had a wholesome belief that the affairs of Alain and Edmée were much more likely to right themselves if left alone, his firm conviction was that the best chance of unravelling this tangled skein lay in his being left to do it unhindered by the advice or presence of any coadjutor.

‘But as for my nephew’s return,’ she went on, impatiently, ‘I do think it very extraordinary that you should persist in declining to use my cousin’s influence. No one could help us so effectually, nor be more *au courant* of public affairs.’

As usual when she touched on this subject M. Delys took refuge in silence and a pinch of snuff, and she felt under too great obligations to him to act directly against his will, though chafing at the obstacles imposed to her re-opening communications with De Pelven, whom she had ascertained, through some of those who frequented her salon, to be again in Paris. He had quietly returned, as soon as immediate

danger had passed, taking a different lodging, and keeping himself out of sight, content to withdraw from public affairs for a time, convinced that the reign of the Directory could not last long, and watching with great interest the fast-rising fortunes of Napoleon. To such keen eyes the chances and probabilities of the future were already mapped out with sufficient distinctness. Although for the time apparently inactive, he was far from unoccupied. His employment, one which had always greatly attracted him, was a series of experiments on electricity; he had considerable scientific knowledge, and had followed attentively that vast development of science which had marked the latter half of the century, and contributed largely, though indirectly, to the Revolution. Well aware of its importance, the little company of whom he was one looked down as disdainfully on the contemptuous Académie Française as that learned body did on the Académie des Sciences. De Pelven was not too much occupied, however, to forget to be on the alert for all which could touch a subject as important to him as ever. His desire to find Edmée had lived unchanged during the many months during which he had lost sight of her; if he ever, during some brief interval could believe it dying out, some mere trifle was sure to warn him that it had only slumbered to awake with new force. After every measure to find her failed, and altered times lessened his means of search, he owned himself not baffled, but simply obliged to wait until something or other should again put him on the track. It came, with the information given him by someone whom he had set to watch whether any steps were taken in St. Aignan's behalf, and the first warning that David had applied to have this name removed from the list of *émigrés* sent De Pelven to thank him courteously for taking action in his cousin's behalf, and enquire how he came to be interested in him. David, knowing nothing beyond the bare facts, answered that he had been requested to do so by one of his pupils, and De Pelven transferred his enquiries to Balmat, whose blunt good sense was a fair match for his subtlety, but De Pelven did more than extract the bare facts that the young Swiss had received kindness from Alain, and had heard of him lately as wishing to return to France; he had his outgoings and incomings watched, and discovering that he lived in that Maison Crocq where there was strong reason to believe that Edmée had once dwelt he felt sure that Balmat, not Isnard, was the

man who had saved Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and protected Edmée. From that moment Isnard became insignificant in his eyes; though contemptuously aware that he had vowed vengeance against him; he had a careless, constitutional bravery which made such a matter as this absolutely indifferent to him, and thenceforward Isnard might be free or not; De Pelven did not take the trouble to suggest that he should be released, but if his friends recollected to urge his cause, he might walk out of prison any day now, since nothing which he did could greatly affect the problem which once more began to possess De Pelven's mind. The link which he wanted was found, and yet it was not easy to discover more. Balmat seemed to have few friends; he went to no café, he visited no women; he seldom spent an hour anywhere except in the Louvre, where none but artists and their families lived; it was impossible therefore that Edmée should be there, De Pelven thought, for a lodging in the Louvre had always been a great and eagerly-sought favour, granted only to eminent painters and engravers.

The letters sent to Edmée had all gone under cover to Balmat to the Maison Crocq, where, if anyone noticed them, they were supposed to have come from Switzerland. De Pelven had hitherto desired Alain's absence; he began now to regard his return as the only means of solving the mystery of Edmée's retreat. Alain in Paris, Edmée would certainly, if De Pelven comprehended her character at all, show her presence by communicating with him, or, if she did not, Mademoiselle de St. Aignan would. Far from opposing David's influence in favour of Alain, De Pelven, weighing all, desired his success, and wrote himself to Alain to tell him of the steps taken on his behalf. He had not told it to David, but he knew well where to find him. It was not the first time that they had had some communication. Long ere this he had convinced himself that Alain had had no hand in the Royalist plot wherein his father had been concerned; there was no debt owing on that score, but until now his absence had seemed essential to De Pelven, and he had returned answers to his enquiries which had made the thought of returning to France highly distasteful to Alain. Now, however, the weariness of exile, howsoever kind the strangers amongst whom he lived, the desire to see his country again, and realise what had really been passing during those five

momentous years which he had spent in other lands, deprived of any sure sources of information, and among those who, seeing only the monstrous crimes of the Revolution, and knowing nothing of their causes, had even a greater horror of them than many who had suffered personally, urged him to accept the overtures made him, and just about the time that Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had made all arrangements for revisiting her beloved little property at Mortemart, Alain de St. Aignan turned his steps homewards.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DE PELVEN GOES TO CHURCH.

ALAIN DE ST. AIGNAN had been nearly five years absent from that France which had forced emigration upon him as the only alternative from death. He had gone into exile, amazed and bewildered by the flood of misfortune which had in a day, in a moment, as it seemed, bereft him of name, rank, fortune, and family, bestowing on him instead only a bond, unlooked-for and undesired, which thenceforward must clog his steps wherever he moved. He came back as a man older than his years, one who had seen the world, and seen it with very different eyes from what he would have done had he remained a member of a privileged class, with a life already shaped out for him. He had lived in other countries, watched the working of other governments; rude truths had met his ear, and work for daily bread, often uncertain and hardly earned, had been familiar to him. It would be hard to say what he felt as he again set foot on French soil. There was joy, there was bitterness; he was once more in his native country; but what a new world this France seemed of which all these years he had known nothing but through refugees, furious against the new régime, or soldiers belonging to the army of Italy, whose acquaintance he had chanced to make, enthusiastic admirers of Napoleon. Every path once familiar to him had been changed; he had to learn the new ones. His birth had once placed him within reach of almost every social prize; now his name and rank counted rather as a misfortune, if not a crime, which society held it his duty to atone for as far as possible. Everything

which once, as the popular proverb had it, seemed 'stable as the Bastille,' had, like that very Bastille, been swept away, and by a torrent of blood. Institutions were annihilated, families rooted out, or surviving in but two or three scattered members, hardly aware of each other's existence. As far as he knew he was the only surviving St. Aignan. He came straight to Paris, where he intended to seek out De Pelven, before seeing anyone else, and here the immensity of the change first fully revealed itself to him. Not only the very names of the streets, whether historical or aristocratic, were changed, but the inhabitants were even more altered. Where were the files of carriages galloping on the road to Versailles? Where was that incessant clamour of church-bells which used to mingle with those shouts of 'Vive le Roi!' which the Parisians used to boast lasted from dawn to dawn? Where were the crowds of guests and supplicants flocking to the great hôtels of Choiseul, Condé, De Noailles, and a hundred more? Where the ecclesiastics from the bishop to the curé? the regiments with their splendid officers passing through the streets, and the gay and brilliant costumes where silver and gold, blue, scarlet and peach-colour mingled? All that magnificent, gay, frivolous world which used to be known as 'all Paris' gone, and in its stead a studied coarseness of manners and costume, or a marked and defiant foppishness. Had Alain been less of a stranger he would easily have distinguished the political opinions of those who passed him in the streets; the aristocrats were unquestionably gaining ground over the Reds, who cast angry and hostile looks on the huge white cravats and love-locks which the young 'Merveilleux' had adopted as a badge of their party, while the Royalists glanced with irritating and aggressive scorn on the rough or classic costumes, and heads cropped *à la Brutus* of their enemies. Alain stood looking around him, debating what he should do next, astonished and perplexed by all he saw, and marvelling at the unconcern with which everyone but himself passed by spots on which he could scarcely school himself to look calmly. Under the walls of the Tuileries, over the very spot where the guillotine had stood, where King and Queen, princes, nobles, all that was once the pride of France had perished, through streets where day after day but a little while ago the tumbrils had borne their death-doomed loads, the tide of life flowed on, with absolute unconcern, as if these things had

never been. He almost believed himself dreaming. The last time he had stood in Paris was during the Reign of Terror; how had everyday life so soon resumed its sway, that to outward appearance no one recollected those days? Another sign that times were rapidly changing from what he recalled soon showed itself. In the street where he had now made his way the passers-by seemed all going with a definite object in one direction, with an expectant, eager air which made him demand from a woman near whither they were going. She looked up hastily and suspiciously in his face, seemed reassured by what she saw, and answered low, but with a great gladness in her voice, 'You are a stranger? an exile perhaps? You have come at a good moment; the Church of Bonne Nouvelle is opened to-day! the first to be re-opened in Paris! We do not know how the people will take it, but the Directory permit it. Ah, dear Jesus, to enter a church again! What happiness!' and wiping joyful tears away she hastened on, and Alain, much surprised and moved, followed the stream setting in the direction of the church so appropriately named. It was already so crowded that he could only find a place near the doors, whence he could see the throng, whose deep emotion told of the great event which the reopening of a consecrated building was to them. For nearly six years no one present had attended any religious service in such a place, years during which the very name of God was proscribed, when birth, marriage, and death were alike unblest by any minister of religion, and France had publicly proclaimed herself atheist. The venerable priest who now stood before the altar was one who in the most imminent peril had refused to leave his flock; the hand which he raised in benediction was maimed, and told a tale of some cruel ill-usage; the white-veiled girls kneeling before him had been gathered in secrecy and danger to be prepared for the confirmation which, if the mob allowed it, was to take place the next day; the sister of charity who in the grey mornings had conducted them to his hiding-place had passed through a thousand dangers; the congregation now met had wept, trembled, suffered for themselves, their dear ones, their country, and the times were yet so unquiet, the sense of danger so present, that women held up their little ones, exclaiming, 'Bless them; let them have a priest's blessing while they can; it may be their only chance!' and a sympathetic thrill of tearful emo-

tion ran through the crowd, now pressing not only in the church, but covering the steps, and gathering thickly in the street below. The mass of those present were women, but here and there stood a man, and one of these, partly masked by a pillar, stood with folded arms and a look of such absorbed and concentrated watchfulness that Alain had noticed it with interest, and a perception that here was something altogether apart and out of keeping with the universal feeling, before recognising with much surprise the last person whom he should have expected to see in such a place, and such a scene. 'De Pelven here! whom is he seeking!' Alain was asking himself, just as a slight eager change passed over the pale face, as he looked over the heads of the kneeling crowd. Evidently he had detected whatever he was seeking, and Alain's eye involuntarily followed the same direction, but so dense was the throng that he could not be sure whether the object of De Pelven's search was a girl, quite unconscious of observation, dressed in white, with a blue fillet in her abundant, shining hair, her face bowed and hidden in her slender hands. Presently she raised it, and there was a touching look of tearful hope and trust, as if a promise of something earnestly besought had come to her during her prayer. The office was concluding; De Pelven drew a little back, as much out of sight as the press allowed, and as he did so his eyes fell on St. Aignan. He started visibly, with discomfiture almost beyond his power to conceal. 'A bad omen, if I believed in omens—or anything else,' he murmured to himself, while he made a slight sign of recognition. He did not look again towards the slender kneeling figure on which just before his ardent gaze had been fixed, and waited where he was until the congregation began to stream out of the church, with a joyful, agitated buzz of voices, and he could approach Alain, who was waiting for him on the steps, and said, holding out his hand with an incredulous smile, 'Of all the many surprising things which I have encountered yet, to find you here is the most so.'

'I hoped to see someone there of whom I have lost sight for some time,' answered De Pelven, calmly. 'It is a great day for the women!' and while they took their way to his apartment he turned the conversation to Alain's own affairs and prospects with interest unfeigned, for he greatly desired to understand them, though the motive was one which he did

not care to mention. This meeting with a relation, after the isolation of exile, and the strange chances and changes of these last years woke in Alain a warmth and cordiality which under any other circumstances he could not possibly have felt for De Pelven. They met like survivors of a great danger ; for the time all differences of opinion and of character vanished ; Alain saw in him nothing but the man who had held out a hand to help him to escape, when escaping meant life, and another day on French soil death ; who had, as he believed, protected Mademoiselle de St. Aignan to the utmost of his power, and at great personal risk, and who, as far as he knew, was the only relation still remaining to him. They entered the apartment of De Pelven, and looked at each other with a smile ; it seemed so long a time since they had met that each supposed the other must be greatly changed. It was not so altogether ; the elder man had not altered ; as Alain had last seen the pale, weary countenance, so he beheld it again, but he himself looked much older ; there were lines drawn upright on his forehead which had been absent when last they met, and the expression of the mouth was grave to sternness. De Pelven's face darkened. 'A man whom women would love,' was his judgment, and then he said, pointing to a seat, 'So you began by joining the army on the frontiers ?'

'After my father's death—Yes.'

'But you were too aristocratic ? They would not have you even in the regiment of artists ?'

'It seems so—I stayed as long as I could, and Hoche, who came up one day when I chanced to be sketching, proved a good friend to me, but after all I was better satisfied to be out of it.'

'Out of the army of defence ! An unpatriotic sentiment, *mon cher*.'

'To defend one's country would be a pleasanter business if it did not involve the risk of killing one's best friend or nearest relation. There were too many Frenchmen in the Austrian ranks.'

'All traitors, you know ; only fit for food for powder or St. Guillotine.'

'The end of it was that I found poor De Férias wounded on a field where some six hundred of ours and as many more of the enemy lay dead and dying, helped him to escape, and but for Hoche should have been despatched myself as you suggest.'

‘What possessed you to read liberty and fraternity in a way not understood by the nation!’

‘Hoche got me off, but advised me to leave the army, so I took up brush instead of sword, made my way to Italy, and was free to be what I had desired all my life—an artist.’

‘You were not tempted to join the army of the Princes?’

‘Bah! That was a step that I could not take, even to please my father.’

‘The event proves you right. They have not been precisely a success.’

‘How should they! Good heavens! will nothing teach people to read the signs of the times? Do you know that in that absurd army all the old etiquette was as far as possible strictly maintained, and that the volunteers who were not nobles—the very men who sacrificed most, were most absolutely loyal, were ordered to form a regiment apart, so as not to contaminate the well-born, and to wear a grey uniform instead of royal blue! Is it wonderful that the soldiers of the Republic proved invincible?’

De Pelven gave his low, ironical laugh. ‘There are some lessons which royal birth incapacitates men from learning.’

‘Lessons have come thick and fast, but there has scarcely been time to learn them—one stands bewildered.’

‘You recollect what Turgot said to the King when laying before him a plan of general education—“Sire, in ten years the nation will be so altered that no one will know it!” He spoke more truly than he knew, only he had not exactly foreseen what the change would be. If he could return he would feel like a shepherd, who after a nap awakes to find his sheep turned into wolves. And then—let me see—you fell in with a rich native of perfidious Albion, travelled with him, developing the barbarian’s taste for art; he bought your sketches, believed in your genius, finally took you to England. But do you mean that anyone else is equally deluded? that you sell your paintings?’

‘Even so,’ answered Alain, laughing at the air of astonishment assumed by his cousin.

It was said that you were one of the train of the Mesdames Adelaide and Victoire.’

‘No; I paid my respects to the Princesses, when in Rome, as a matter of duty, but that little Court of theirs would not have suited me. I might have made some blunder as fatal as

poor Rousard, a young artist who was a *protégé* of theirs, and nearly sent them into a fit by appearing in what to their eyes was a tri-colour scarf, in his a cravat of most harmonious colours, bought at a country fair.'

'Hum! Between ourselves, what are your intentions? Your moderate Republicanism will not answer; moderates always get crushed between the millstones of extreme parties. What do you mean to do when the right time comes?'

'Do! What remains for the man who is unfortunate enough not to be able to hold extreme opinions? Even if I were a Royalist I am bound by the pledges which I gave on returning to France.'

'Bonds which sit lightly enough on a good many who have returned. As for me, I have serious thought of turning Royalist. I want a new sensation. I have had enough of democrats, and now I begin to fear that I shall vegetate as I did before the Revolution broke out. How I blessed it! Plots amuse me, if they are complicated enough, and the best now going on are among the Royalists.'

'You have other amusements, it would seem,' said Alain, uncertain whether he spoke in jest or earnest, and not desirous to know, and he took up a treatise by Duplay, lying open on the table.

'Oh' said De Pelven, with mock deprecation. 'Amusements, yes, that is the right word. You recollect how Maury reminded us poor men of science that the mathematician and chemist are only known to a mere handful of pedants, while authors and orators like himself speak to the universe. It was Maury, too, who observed that the members of the Academy looked on us as merely their valets.'

A silence fell on them; all this time each had had a certain thought uppermost in his mind, and hesitated to utter it. St. Aignan now asked abruptly, 'So you know nothing of my aunt?'

'Nothing, since, as I told you, she disappeared inexplicably from the refuge which I had found her.'

'She may have escaped and returned to Mortemart. The little property there was her own, and she was very fond of it.'

'No. I went down there lately—some little time back, I mean, but nothing had been heard of her, and now the property is in other hands. I heard of its being sold not long since.'

‘And that girl?’

De Pelven shrugged his shoulders.

‘Then absolutely you know nothing of her fate?’

‘*Mon cher*, I have a fair guess at it, since, as I sent you word, I saw her some time after Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was re-arrested—her fate could have been no other—walking with a young fellow with whom she seemed on the best of terms. What could you expect? A girl who did not even love you, it seems—’

‘How should she? I told you the circumstances of our marriage.’

‘Well, can you suppose that all these years she would love no one else? My dear cousin, you are idyllic! How should she know you would ever return? *Peste!* What did you expect?’

‘It is useless now to tell you,’ answered Alain, gloomily. De Pelven watched him, seeking to divine the course of his thoughts, too deeply interested in the matter himself to be able to study the working of Alain’s mind with his usual discernment.

‘When I left France my marriage seemed a sort of doubtful dream,’ said Alain, passing his hand over his eyes. ‘Then——’

‘You forgot all about it, just as the demoiselle did,’ laughed De Pelven.

‘I might have done so. As it was circumstances made it suddenly a fact to me. Your letter shipwrecked my hopes.’

Again De Pelven shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands.

‘I had supposed my aunt could take care of my wife for me, but it seems she had not been arrested when the girl disappeared?’

‘That good aunt! You chose an admirable guardian! She was completely deceived by her, but then she is so easily deceived that she believes even in me, your poor cousin.’

‘You have no suspicion who the man was?’

‘None; he looked well-born enough; she had the good taste not to desert you for a *roturier*, I fancy.’

Silence again fell on them; De Pelven was seeking to gather the broken and entangled skeins of his plans and wishes, which were much entangled by the return of Alain

sooner than he had anticipated ; something had been done in deepening the prejudice against Edmée, which he had already created, but a few words from Balmat, a meeting with Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, might undo his work. He had often been marvellously served by the chapter of accidents ; on the whole he had reason to expect it would turn in his favour, but he found himself much less master of the situation than usual, and that at a time all important to him. His chief hope lay in Edmée's pride ; he thought she would avoid a personal interview, and merely signify by writing that Alain was free if he wished it, and that he would at once close with the suggestion De Pelven could not now doubt. Nothing but honour could ever have induced him to reclaim the bride, whose white, imploring face of reluctance and terror was all which he could recall of her, and even that had become a dim memory. And yet De Pelven felt a strange regret that he had blackened her fair fame, and hated Alain all the more for being the cause that he had done so.

‘ Divorces are in fashion just now,’ he suggested.

‘ They are fortunately,’ answered Alain, briefly. He could not lay bare his feelings to De Pelven, who was studying him with cold and curious eyes. Inheriting the strong desire for domestic life which had characterised his mother, and made her, in the height of youth and beauty, leave Paris to seclude herself with her boy at St. Aignan, he had lived enough after her death in the fashionable world to know the hollow thing which marriage usually was, and had seen one or two happy exceptions which also showed him what it might be. In those days everyone had a system, a theory, or an ideal. Alain had his, cherished, unguessed ; he believed in love in married life. While the gay world thought it *bourgeois*, and the materialists explained it away in a fashion different but as complete, Alain dreamed of a wife who should not be the fancy of a day, or the mere sharer of his name and rank, but a companion and friend, growing dearer as the years went on, and many joys and sorrows had been shared between them. This was what Alain gained from the theories of family life and natural affections which were floating about in his boyhood, and working for good and ill in many different ways which Rousseau never dreamed of, and the dream had been very sweet. There had been a day when it had fled into the background, but a sharp lesson

had been read which he took home, and profited by, and again the former vision reigned, only now with more power and a hope that a girl who could act as Edmée had done might realise his ideal. The answer sent by De Pelven to the first letter which he could safely write to him dashed this castle in the air rudely to the ground. The bitterness which had overwhelmed him when he first read it came upon him afresh now that he heard spoken what he had already learned from the written words.

‘I did what I could, as your heart seemed in the matter,’ said De Pelven, carelessly. ‘I ascertained that nothing was known of the girl at St. Aignan. *Apropos* of that—do you mean to take any steps for recovering that property?’

‘What would be the use? I have no title to show to it, and if I had, I would not live there for many reasons. That business of my marriage—and besides, the peasantry would look on me as an enemy. For many a year to come they will hold every aristocrat their enemy. They have a thousand years of slavery to remember.’

‘If you remain in Paris, recollect that my rooms are at your service.’

Alain thanked him and accepted, for a time at all events. Reluctantly enough he rose to visit David, and thank him for the steps which he had taken in his behalf. De Pelven saw him go with no little anxiety as to what he should hear on his return, and a poignant regret that neither *lettres de cachet* nor secret police still existed, by whose means he might have spirited Balmat out of the way. In Balmat he recognised the most dangerous point of the whole affair.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MEETING IN THE ATELIER.

ALAIN'S visit to David was not paid that day. He wanted solitude, time to understand his position, to plan his future, to comprehend the world in which he found himself—wanted, too, to escape from what he felt instinctively to be the hostile

scrutiny of De Pelven, towards whom his old mistrust began to awake, though all his cousin's acts had, as far as he knew, been uniformly friendly, and he received the information given him without questioning its truth. The next day he took a portfolio of oil sketches, and sought Balmat at the Maison Crocq, where he himself had been lodged during the brief, perilous visit to Paris which he had made between joining the army of defence and his father's death, but found that he was at the atelier in the Louvre. Alain turned his steps thither to find him. The atelier used by David's students was just below that known as 'Les Horaces,' from the celebrated picture painted there by David, who had since abandoned it for one in the top story of the Louvre, and installed two of his best pupils in it. The silence and order reigning in the students' atelier astonished Alain not a little; the forty or fifty lads and men who occupied it were all hard at work, sitting or standing, those nearest the door copying from casts, another more advanced set were painting at their easels on the left, and ranged in a semicircle about a low, large scaffold, on which stood a live model, were a third division, studying from life. Only one voice broke the stillness, a harsh, rasping voice, yet with considerable kindness in it, which seemed criticising and laying down doctrines, as the speaker moved from easel to easel, listened to with respectful attention. Even the pupils nearest the door had only cast a rapid glance towards Alain as he entered, and then resumed their work, anxious to gain an approving word from their master, who was making a tour of inspection among them. Alain understood it immediately, and stood waiting until the progress of the *tourn  e* should bring David towards him. 'Good, very good; go on, Maurice,' Alain heard him say, as he reached the easel of Maurice Quai; and turning to the others, he added, 'There is one who will do great things if he chooses; he loves nature and understands the antique,' and he passed to the next, leaving Maurice colouring with pleasure all over his thin, bearded face, while some of his companions murmured laughingly, 'A victory for you to-day, old Don Quixote!' by which name the enthusiastic artist was known in the atelier. The next was less fortunate. He was painting with such ardour that he did not perceive the master standing beside him until David clapped him on the shoulder, exclaiming, 'Cannot you wait

moment, Vincent! the first thing that you, and you, and you,' pointing to several others, 'have to do is to forget everything you learned before you came here. You are all of you infected by the Academical mania. When pictures are made where there are no heads, no hands, no feet, you will beat us all! Gentlemen, the Academy teaches art as a profession; make it such if you like, but here we study art for art—Monsieur!' as he suddenly perceived St. Aignan, 'I fear you have been waiting some time? May I ask to whom I have the honour to speak?'

'I have every reason to be delighted with the delay, since it has enabled me to hear Louis David give a lesson on the art in which he is so great a master,' said Alain, bowing. 'I was on my way to offer you my thanks for all which you have done on my behalf; but I came here to seek a friend—whom I see yonder. Balmat! we meet again, thanks to you and to M. David.'

Balmat had hurried from his place at the sound of St. Aignan's voice; until then he had been too much absorbed in following the master's remarks to see or hear anything else.

'How! M. de St. Aignan!' said David, looking with manifest approval on Alain, 'I hope you intend to pay me a visit too? Perhaps I have something not without interest to show you. I am going to my atelier now, the Atelier des Sabines—if you care to accompany me—and you too, Balmat.'

They bowed and followed him, exchanging a few cordial words as they did so. David hurried up the stairs leading to his attic before them; he had an undisguised vanity and desire for approbation rather childlike than childish, and made no attempt to conceal the eagerness with which he awaited Alain's approval, pointing out whatever he considered called for most praise, and claiming his assent with *naïve* frankness.

'I have undertaken to do a thing absolutely new,' he said, 'I am leading art back to Greek principles. When I painted my Horaces and my Brutus, I was still under the influence of Roman art. But after all, what were the Romans to the Greeks in such matters? Barbarians! novices! My aim is now pure Greek art; I think, as the Hellenes did, that form is all important; the original idea is of far less weight than the manner in which it is rendered. Ah, ah! my Sabines will astonish a good many people; is it not so, monsieur?'

St. Aignan stood contemplating the famous picture with

sincere admiration for the fine drawing, but with great disappointment in the colouring, and a perception that no miracle would ever breathe life into the coldly correct groups. Fortunately David was too eager to discuss the question whether there should be bits in the horses' mouths or not, and the advisability of undraped figures, to perceive the shade of coldness in his praise, and had besides much to say about the schools of Italian painting, surprising his listeners by the warmth and reverence with which he alluded to those old masters whom his pupils so greatly disdained, and whose example he himself was so far from following. Balmat's interest in the conversation was much lessened by his thoughts being full of Edmée. He would have given much could he have contrived to warn her how near Alain was, but it was impossible, and after all, perhaps, so best. Balmat had no great belief in any good coming out of interference with other people's affairs, and therefore, when Alain took leave of David, he declined to accompany him to the Atelier du Lys, whither he took his way, having learned from Balmat that M. Delys, an old friend of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, had been the moving spring in enabling him to return. His art was so supremely interesting to him that this visit to the Louvre, and the conversation with David, had banished all other thoughts for the time; he would willingly have made a tour among all the other studios in the Louvre, and his surprise and pleasure were great on learning his return to have been effected through the old painter, whom he remembered with the affectionate amusement which M. Delys awoke in all his acquaintance. Balmat returned to his easel, his disquiet unguessed; Alain entered the Atelier du Lys. As he did so, Edmée paused in reading aloud a poem of Ossian to M. Delys, who was as enthusiastic on that score as any of the younger artists. She looked more than ever like one of 'the white-armed daughters of Fingal,' as she sat with the sunlight on her hair. For the moment the haunting expectation of Alain's return had left her, she was totally unprepared for it, and it was only the sound of his voice, as he named himself, and the agitation of M. Delys which warned her that the moment so looked for, so feared, had come. The book fell from her hand; he advanced and gave it back to her with a bow, then continued to speak to M. Delys, who was so moved, so confused by the thought of Edmée, the

sight of St. Aignan, and his own feelings that he was saying he knew not what, and making all kinds of incoherent statements. Their voices seemed to come muffled to the ear of Edmée, who had let herself sink on a seat, terrified by her own sensations; the beating of her heart seemed stifling her, and she gathered with great relief that she was unrecognised. Presently she heard M. Delys exclaim with a tone of great pleasure, 'Ah, Monsieur le Comte! you are very like your mother! Yes, wonderfully like;' and venturing to look at him, Edmée saw the smile which illuminated Alain's face, and made M. Delys repeat, 'Her image! what happiness to see you here, safe, well.'—All his objections to Alain had been blown away by that look of Madame de St. Aignan which Edmée too now recognised at once, wondering that she had not seen it when they were together on that eventful night, but then he had probably looked as unlike what he did now as she did to that bride whose face he had scarcely seen. She could hardly believe that this was the Alain of that time, and as for making herself known, some better moment must be found; at present it was simply impossible. M. Delys was asking details of his return, and his plans, and he began to describe his life in Italy and England, where he had found a fine school of landscape-painting of which M. Delys had never before heard, and concerning which he remained very incredulous. 'England! England! Do not talk to me of it,' he exclaimed. 'All our misfortunes come from doctrines sent us from England, where they know better than to practise them. I hate the name of England! They have no flower-painters there, I feel sure? No! And deservedly; did they not let Giovanni da Fiori die in a garret, of poverty and neglect, in the 17th century?' Alain laughed, and went to study the painting on M. Delys' easel, turning thence to that on Edmée's.

'This is not done by you,' he said, looking at it with interest. 'No doubt—' and he glanced towards her.

'Yes, my daughter's; have I not a right to be proud of my pupil?' said M. Delys, nervously anxious to avoid an explanation.

'I have never seen any better done; those of Rachel Reusch herself do not surpass them.'

'There are certain flowers which she paints better than I do myself,' said M. Delys, delighted with the approbation;

'look at those campanulas—they seem trembling in the wind. But you—show me what you have there; Balmat, our good Swiss, tells me you paint landscape. Then, of course, you are of Vernet's school?'

'You shall see,' said Alain, opening his portfolio. David had been too much occupied with displaying his own works to notice it, but M. Delys spied it out immediately. Edmée rose, and removed her own canvas to make room for his. He thanked her, giving a momentary glance, withdrawn at once, as she changed colour, and seemed to shrink from observation. He began to get a little curious to hear her voice, for she had not spoken a word since he came in.

'Decidedly you do not follow Quai, who urges his friends to paint nothing under six feet high, and But what is this?' exclaimed M. Delys, aghast, 'this belongs to no school; it is not painting; it is unheard of—flat heresy, revolutionary, monsieur! What can be the meaning of breaking with all traditions of French art?' And then, after a long pause—'But it is beautiful. Yes, beautiful, is it not, *ma fille*?'

It was a view in southern Italy. The sun had set, but the sky was still ablaze, and distant hills seemed to quiver and melt into the glorious splendour. The light had left the foreground, occupied by a dark marsh; a solitary heron was fishing by a pool, round which tall reeds raised their feathery plumes. The solitude was so profound that Edmée held her breath as she looked.

'Where have you learned to paint like this?' asked M. Delys, at last, recovering from his surprise. 'It is neither Vernet's style, nor Louthembourg's it sins against all custom those reeds are reeds, and that is a heron; now the old rule was that it was bad taste to make trees or foliage or birds belong to any exact tribe; the general effect alone should be given. What master have you followed?'

'A mistress—Nature herself,' said Alain, with a smile. 'But I worked hard for years before I was free to make art my business—I believe now that I prospered the better for the difficulties and discouragements I met with—not few!'

'It is not a composition? You saw it under this sunset? Yes, yes, I feel it was so; I never agreed with Diderot—a master in art criticism however! who used to say that one could imagine in one's atelier far more beautiful scenes than

any which nature offers, because there one could arrange everything as one thought best, but still it is absolute heresy to paint thus, is it not, my daughter ?'

'I do not know if it be heresy, but it certainly is a poem,' answered Edmée, to whom the sketch had been a revelation. Alain turned quickly towards her; something in the sweet voice struck him; he only saw a graceful, brown-eyed girl, who seemed confused by his sudden movement. Nothing in her recalled his terrified, shame-stricken bride, but he said smiling, 'It is not the first time that we have met, mademoiselle'—and then, much surprised by her evident emotion, he hastened to add, 'I too was in the church of Borne Nouvelle this morning'—and he could not resist adding, 'where I also met a relation of mine—M. de Pelven.'

'Was he there, monsieur !' said Edmée, scarcely reassured by finding that she was still unknown when new cause for alarm came upon her.

'Has he the good fortune to be a friend of your father's ?'

'No, monsieur, our enemy.'

She spoke low, but with concentrated feeling. St. Aignan could ask no more, and M. Delys, still occupied by the sketch, interrupted—'So you did it from nature ? On the spot ? *Ma foi*, I could believe I had been there myself ! What do you think of it, my child ?'

'I think that it tells both what the scene was, and what the artist felt,' answered Edmée, raising her eyes for an instant to the face of Alain, who thanked her with a smile.

'You pay me a high compliment, mademoiselle,' he said, 'for to paint what he sees, and to make the spectator enter into what he felt are the artist's two great aims.'

'But, my dear count—let me give you your title—it tickles my ear agreeably—you will not sell your pictures,' said M. Delys.

'You think so ?'

'I am certain of it. The French love what they call novelty, but in their hearts they detest anything original. They require time to get reconciled to anything new in art; they have now got used to our landscape-painters. You want to strike out a new route; they will simply feel ill-used, a good beaten road is so safe !'

'Then I shall sell my pictures to the English.'

'Hush ! hush ! that is treason. You might as well

shave with English razors. You, just returned, talking about our national enemies !’

‘What, not to bring their money into France ?’

‘That might possibly excuse your commerce with them. But I must sit down ; I want to consider your sketches at my case. Have you painted nothing but landscapes ?’

‘Portraits sometimes. I had to live, you know.’

‘Brown Italians, blonde Englishwomen *Apropos*, my dear count,’ said M. Delys, who had quite a feminine love of hovering round a dangerous subject, ‘I suppose you have not got married ?’

‘I have no wife,’ returned Alain very briefly, and with darkening face.

‘All in good time,’ said M. Delys, so much taken aback that he hardly knew what he was saying. Edmée, at whom he looked with penitent apology, showed no emotion ; she sat quite still, feeling as if a sudden blow had stunned her. She knew that Alain had changed the subject, and that M. Delys had eagerly joined in ; the moments went by ; she rose quietly and went out, thanking St. Aignan, who had opened the door for her, by a silent bend of the head. He returned to the old painter, ‘I congratulate you on the skill of mademoiselle your daughter.’

‘You are very good poor child,’ stammered M. Delys, much embarrassed. ‘But I ought to tell you—’ he stopped, without any idea of what he was going to say.

‘Perhaps I should have said madame instead of mademoiselle ?’

‘Just so—yes. Madame Alain.’

‘Ah !’ Alain was a common Norman name, and awoke no suspicion in the mind of St. Aignan, to whom this girl was merely the daughter of M. Delys. ‘And your son-in-law is an artist too ?’

‘Yes—that is—she has no husband. She is in your own case.’

Alain looked at him astonished, but vaguely guessing at some sad story, an early widowhood or a worthless husband, asked no more and dismissed the subject from his mind. He cared much more to recall mutual recollections of St. Aignan, and listen to the affectionate respect with which M. Delys spoke of the mother whom the son she had so fondly loved still missed and mourned.

Edmée had gone to her own little room. It was a corner partitioned off from a large hall ; the lofty ceiling was painted with garlands, Cupids, and goddesses, and the walls were covered with faded hangings, on which some traces of gilding still remained. The high and narrow window, in whose deep embrasure she had seated herself, looked on the Seine, flowing far below. There were many such little apartments in this great hive of the Louvre. Edmée's room was almost as simply furnished as that in the Maison Crocq, where M. Delys had found her ; there was a little bed, a solitary chair, and a table on which she had thrown some embroidery, and a copy of Lemercier's 'Agamemnon,' which someone had lent her. The only luxury, if such it could be called, was the mass of bright flowers, opening in the window, up whose side she had trained ivy to climb ; a linnet, tamed for her by Balmat, hopped and chirped among them. The little egotist, like many another favourite, never saw how his mistress sank down, pale, overwhelmed, indignant. She thought that she had foreseen everything which could possibly happen in this first interview, and not a single thing had occurred as she expected. Not only had she been unrecognised, but St. Aignan had declared himself unembarrassed by any wife ! And with what a look, what a tone he had said it ! 'And why ? why ?' she asked herself the question in vain, losing herself in endless mazes of conjecture, without approaching the truth. The situation was strangely complicated. How offer him the liberty which he appeared to think already his ? But what a situation for them both ! That mere civil bond, which she had assumed to be so slight, suddenly seemed to her made of iron. They must face the difficulty some day ; when Mademoiselle de St. Aignan returned, if not before. And Balmat—why had he not warned her that Alain was at hand ? Little by little indignation gave place to depression ; a deep disappointment filled her, though she could give no explanation of it to herself. She thought that she could only wait awhile in silence ; perhaps chance would give her the clue to the enigma, and every moment St. Aignan seemed to her less and less that young bridegroom of five years back. She could not tell what to do. ' Luckily I do not love him !' she thought, and then broke into stormy sobs, by way of proving it. Edmée rarely wept ; tears, far from relieving her, were only exhausting, and when she rose at last, to answer a

summons from M. Delys, she felt shattered and tired, as if by some great shock. He looked at her with anxious, troubled eyes, and waited for her to speak.

‘Are you alone now?’ she asked, in a voice still trembling.

‘Yes, the Count has just gone. My dear child—’

‘Yes, dear master, I have made a mistake, you see. I thought I counted for something in his life—a difficulty, a perplexity, and it is nothing of the kind.’

‘Then he is not worthy of you; he is worth nothing at all, and that I cannot believe. At first I was so angry that I believed everything against him, but every moment that he stayed I liked him better and better. How he resembles his mother! he has the charm of her smile, her look, with the delightful gaiety of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan; I saw this more and more when we were alone together, and conversed of old times; and there is something—I do not know what—about him which makes me feel that I could trust what I held dearest gladly in his hands. What shall you do?’

‘I must wait and see,’ she answered, sadly.

‘Ah! well, I cannot tell you how glad I am that you consent to wait.’

‘I must. It is a detestable position, but of course it will end when Mademoiselle de St. Aignan returns. You understand that? Do not think do not build anything on my waiting.’

‘My dear child! shall you object to my having well consented to his sharing our atelier?’

‘What! has he proposed that?’ asked Edmée, with a start.

‘Not proposed it,’ said M. Delys, guiltily—‘but he was asking my advice as to a studio, and I what could I do?’

‘I understand, well, let it be so: I can stay in my room.’

‘But no, but no,’ said M. Delys, greatly disconcerted. ‘Would you have him suppose you had driven him away? He thinks that you are my daughter; you are Madame Alain to him and everyone. What are you afraid of?’

This was exactly what Edmée would not own even to herself, and she found no answer. M. Delys was so troubled and unhappy at having displeased her, that she found he must be consoled, and allowed to believe that he had done well, but the poor girl’s smile was nearer tears than mirth, when at last, quite reassured, he rubbed his hands, saying,

'Do you know, I was afraid I had made a blunder in consenting to this arrangement; I thought at first you seemed annoyed; your poor old master is terribly afraid of you, naughty child, but now I am quite satisfied; I see that I have done the right thing.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LIFE IN THE ATELIER.

MADemoiselle DE ST. AIGNAN was greatly rejoiced at hearing from M. Delys of her nephew's return, and above all that he was installed in the atelier. She had not given the old painter credit for such a stroke of diplomacy, and convinced that all must be going on exactly as he wished, she thought that to return just yet would be to play the part of a marplot. Edmée daily expected her return, and wrote, urging it, but she let the weeks run on, and still remained at Mortemart, declaring that her little establishment required her presence; she had no groom of the chambers or steward, and must fill these offices herself; besides, she should never be weary of realising that her house, garden, and fields were her own again. It was worth while, she asserted, to have lost everything just to experience once more the delight of possessing a little property. A kindly welcome had not been wanting when she returned; everyone seemed joyfully surprised to find her still alive, and as it were grateful to her for having survived the troubles of the last years. She had been popular at Mortemart, and no ill had befallen her house; the seal of the nation had been set on the doors and cupboards, and no one had bought it until M. Delys became its nominal purchaser. Nothing had suffered, and she resumed her place, found a couple of her former servants glad to return to her, and laughed with all her heart over their candid egotism, when they declared they were delighted to see her return, since it turned out to be a false report that the possessions of all the upper classes were to be divided among the poor. The Revolution had evidently disappointed their modest expectations,

and they did not belong to the class of peasant proprietors, whom it had indeed released from burdens alike destructive and unjust. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan wrote to Edmée that she had all which heart could desire, and Edmée had a passing thought of escaping to Mortemart to avoid the daily meetings with Alain, but told herself that it would be a cowardly flight from an explanation which must come sooner or later. She resolved to stay, though she did not openly admit, even to herself, that what she had dreaded was far from as unendurable as she expected. Like herself and M. Delys, Alain was working in earnest, and he paid her little attention. David had seen his paintings, and recognised their merit, and his praises had brought him several commissions, which entirely occupied him. Notwithstanding all changes, men of birth and education found their own level still, and M. Delys was delighted to see him find at once a footing in the best society which Paris could afford, though he contemplated the life which Alain led with suspicion and disapproval, chiefly because it was so unlike his own. He could tolerate the vagaries of David's pupils, partly because they did not touch him personally, partly because they were sheltered by their master's name, but he fidgeted over Alain, holding himself responsible for all which was done or not done by him to a degree which greatly entertained the object of his anxieties. Alain worked unremittingly for a certain number of hours each day, but after that time he held himself at liberty to spend the rest as pleased him, while M. Delys devoted every moment to his art, cared not that no one would ever dream how long and with what care he had worked at a leaf or flower, and never found the day long enough to satisfy him. He contemplated with astonished interest a style altogether new to him, and greatly influenced by the English school of landscape, then quite unknown in France, he could hardly admit that a man could be a true artist who had as many interests outside of his profession as Alain, or who worked in a way so unlike his own deliberate method, where the results were calculated and reasoned out like a problem in mathematics. M. Delys could never be persuaded that a picture of his was really finished, and would keep whatever he had in hand to touch and retouch it until the patience of the would-be purchaser had long been worn out. At the time that Alain was admitted to make a third in the studio, M. Delys

was at work on an exquisite group of flowers ordered many months before by Joséphine, then newly married to Bonaparte, which he still obstinately refused to relinquish. Edmée was helping him, for he had but told the truth when he asserted that she painted certain flowers better than he did, and she was also busy with a group ordered by the charming and well-known Madame de Noailles, who not only patronised art, but herself studied in the Louvre, as a pupil of Charles Moreau's.

The Atelier du Lys was no longer the silent place which it had been when Edmée and her old master alone occupied it. Alain was apt to intersperse his work with snatches of talk which produced such grumbling replies from M. Delys that he was reduced to addressing them all to Edmée, and when the dinner hour, much more regularly observed since his arrival, brought a short pause in the work of two if not all three, Alain was called on to show the sketches in his portfolio, and tell the history of the courtyards where the shadows lay so thickly, and brown-skinned women with coral necklaces washed their broccoli in some ancient sarcophagus; of the ruins bathed in Italian sunshine, the cool English landscapes and grey seas, and the English peasants, so unlike the bowed, withered, miserable labourers of France as to appear a different race. Or he related adventures, which awoke the mirth of both his hearers, or translated a few stanzas of Tasso, a name until now unknown to Edmée, or a passage from Shakspeare, almost equally unknown, since she had become acquainted with his works only through a translation, lent reluctantly by Maurice Quai to Balmat, with the warning that though the barbarous Elizabethan poet had unquestionably written superb things, it was a snare and a delusion to study the modern instead of the antique. Balmat now and then came, though far less frequently than of old; Edmée wondered why, at first, and then forgot to wonder. He would have gladly come every day had he not thought her embarrassed by the presence of one who knew her secret, for Alain had won his heart, and to watch the ease and delight with which he worked was an unceasing wonder to Balmat, who knew his own defects only too well, and saw in Alain the opposite of them all. No one, except perhaps Alain, knew through what dark days Balmat was passing, as far from supporting himself as ever, unable to prove to his

family that he had done right in leaving home and the security of daily bread for the precarious chances of success as an artist, miserable at still subsisting on their slender means, and perplexed by having the doctrines of the 'Primitives' dinned into his ears, which utterly condemned the style of art in which alone he seemed to succeed. Alain was not long in discovering his circumstances and understanding his character, and sought earnestly to help him. Balmat bore his fellow-students no grudge for their unsparing mockery, but he would rather have died than exposed his position to them. Only from Alain, seeking, as he believed the same end as himself, if by another road, Alain, who knew how to exorcise the downheartedness that weighed on him with increasing and torturing persistency, could he consent to take enough for his small needs, as he might from a brother. Balmat's strong attachment to Edmée soon struck St. Aignan, who at first had hardly noticed his silent fellow-worker, except to feel slightly annoyed by the uneasy vigilance of M. Delys whenever he spoke to her. It fully explained the constraint which he could not but perceive in her manner, but as they all grew used to each other, and M. Delys began to forget their embarrassing position, and think only of St. Aignan as an artist, and Edmée lulled into temporary security let herself drift spell-bound into mutual interests, and the charm of opinions compared and discussed, a sweet and peaceful intimacy sprang up. He found himself seeking to awaken the bright look of interest which she turned to him when he advanced some theory, or told some tale of his exile, and the tones of her voice lingered on his ear after she was silent. It was a happier time than either understood. Alain was satisfied with the present and asked nothing of the future; Edmée had grown afraid to let herself think of her false position, and prized unconsciously the time which must end with the return of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. Now and then she passionately longed for an explanation, but in Alain's presence she only felt that deep and entire satisfaction which asked for nothing, needed nothing, and was so unlike anything which she had ever experienced that it told her no tales. Yet both began to feel that there were depths in each other's lives unknown and which they could not sound. Edmée was not only reserved by nature, but had the story of her life to hide; Alain, under a gay and

frank manner, was in point of fact still more so, and some of those who believed they knew him best really knew him least, accepting the surface transparency for the depths below. His total silence as to all connected with herself perplexed Edmée more and more, and whenever she thought of it, which was seldomer than might easily be believed in this calm, fully occupied life, it brought a constraint over her which puzzled him quite as much. She had feared that he might bring De Pelven to the atelier, but he knew too well the abhorrence of M. Delys for intruders to bring any of his friends there, and his cousin could hardly be counted among his friends, now that the first natural pleasure at their meeting had cooled. Besides, the look and tone with which Edmée had disclaimed him as anything but an enemy was fresh in his memory, and he had avoided naming her to De Pelven, who only knew that he was sharing an atelier in the Louvre with an old painter who used formerly to visit St. Aignan. De Pelven waited on the watch for some intelligence of Edmée, and marvelled more and more that she gave no sign. Perhaps it was the artistic temperament in Alain which enabled him to draw such enjoyment from the present, and put aside at will all thought of past or future. He found the Atelier du Lys more attractive every day. He and Edmée were often to all intents *tête-à-tête*, for when at the other end of the long room M. Delys was quite out of earshot, and even when near was too much absorbed in his work, after the first uneasy days, to notice them. He usually had several pictures in hand, and gave now an hour to one, now to another, as the state of the painting invited him, and thus, in spite of his extreme deliberation, lost not a moment, and got through a great deal of work in a year. They spoke low, however, when they conversed, knowing that he could not endure that talk should reach him, either because it distracted his thoughts from what he had in hand, or because it interfered with the perpetual criticism of his work which he maintained while he painted, although each touch was laid on with perfect knowledge of the effect which it would produce, and while the admiring public saw only the exquisite results, apparently so easily produced, each touch had been reflected over, planned and reasoned out before the brush had touched the canvas. He had trained Edmée on the same system, but her feminine nature sometimes got the better of her, and she would make

experiments, or paint with too much impetuosity, and find herself obliged to efface and correct, while he hardly ever needed to improve anything which was once embodied on his canvas.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST.

THESE daily conversations gradually became longer and more personal, and to that power of sympathetic listening on Edmée's part which had won Balmat's shy confidence was added an intensity of tremulous interest, of which Alain could not be unaware, whose sweet, unintentional flattery beguiled him into revelations which would half startle, half provoke him when afterwards he recalled them; but the temptation was strong, and unawares he yielded to it again and again in this unrestrained intimacy, shielded by the nominal surveillance of M. Delys. Thus Edmée learned the history of his battle with the world, of the success which he felt to be undeserved good fortune, knowing well its rarity, and seeing how men his equals, perhaps his superiors, could not get their heads above that sea of life on which he floated easily. Thus, too, she gathered what his hopes and views had been for France before the torrent of Revolution swept all before it; his intense disappointment, and the brave spirit which hoped still amid what could then seem but the ruins of a world. So had hoped all that was young and enthusiastic in France, but few had coolness enough to see where the mistakes had been—the crimes were visible enough—or courage to hope still. Edmée was in some degree prepared by her acquaintance with Balmat's sturdy Republicanism to enter into Alain's views with tolerance such as earlier she could not have shown, though such moderate opinions as his could hardly approve themselves to a feminine mind, to which either extreme would have been more comprehensible, and in fact Alain belonged to that small band who, choosing the middle way, must inevitably find themselves in troublous times crushed between the mill-stones of two extreme parties.

‘We were to live under an absolute monarchy, if not a despotism,’ he once said, speaking of his school days, ‘and yet our whole training was Republican! pure Republican! Tacitus and Livy, and the institutions of Lycurgus had prepared us thoroughly for Rousseau and Voltaire. As for the history of our own country, we never read a page of it. And with this sort of training we all supposed ourselves capable of re-modelling the world—and such a world as France! We applauded all the Republican speeches at the theatres; we were all eager to step down from our pedestals of birth and privileges; but then we never supposed that we should not be able to step up again whenever we wished it. To be a Frenchman, and above all a Frenchman of the eighteenth century, seemed the finest thing on earth to us all.’

‘It seems as if just when the nobles were doing their best for the people, they were repaid by persecution!’

‘True, but what would you have? How could the people believe us in earnest? What would we seem to them but merciless oppressors? If you had been in England, or even in Germany, and seen what the people are there, and compared them with ours, brutalised, stupefied with hopeless toil

I recollect asking a woman at St. Aignan her age—it was twenty-eight, and she was bent and wrinkled like a woman of sixty. My mother, who was with me, asked if she was married; she answered sullenly, “Would you have me bear children to be as miserable as their mother?”’

‘Yet St. Aignan was—’ Edmée paused suddenly; she found herself on the point of defending the condition of her commune, blame of which seemed to reflect on the seigneur and his family.

‘St. Aignan was far better off than most places, for during many years my dear mother lived almost constantly there. Yet she could do nothing beyond assisting the poor immediately under her notice. All local government was centred in officials appointed by Government—there was the root of all evil! If my father had wanted to make a road, repair a bridge, set some charity on foot, leave must be asked from some official, and probably refused. What was there to induce any noble to live *en province* where he had nothing to do? He went to Versailles!’

‘Is it possible you think we have gained by the Revolution?’

‘Personally? No!’

‘I meant generally.’

‘Certainly.’ And then he painted rapidly for some time, paused to contemplate his work, and continued as if there had been no break in the conversation. ‘At whatever cost, some abuses are gone for ever. Where one digs deep to drain stagnant pools, miasmas necessarily must arise before the ground is renewed and the air clear.’

‘But how little we have gained!’

‘Too true. The weakness of the Revolution hitherto is that its aim has been merely to attack.’

‘If we only were sure that we had come to an end of it!’

‘The end of it! It is hardly begun. It is a European movement, and may take centuries to work out.’

‘Do you think so?’ said Edmée, noting the correspondence between his opinion and that of his clear-sighted aunt.

‘What happens when people quit an old house and have all the world before them where to choose another in which to settle?’

‘They never do settle.’

‘Exactly. We have got out of our old house, and built a new one, but that is no proof that we shall be contented to stay there. We have made it ourselves, to our own fancy, and now all we have to do is to find out all its faults and desire another.’

Here M. Delys came to see what progress Edmée was making in her work, the only break in his own which he allowed himself, and after a minute inspection, turned to the landscape which Alain was painting from one of the studies which he had in his portfolios.

‘So this is an English landscape,’ he said, meditatively. ‘I cannot understand your having had an order for it. I should have said that our public would not have endured this pearly-grey tone, this evident copying of nature, pure and simple; this I know not what of vague, mysterious poetry. It is not according to our national taste, unless that, like everything else, is altering strangely. I should as soon have expected our Parisians to endure Roxana on the stage in real Eastern costume, or a peasant at the opera in a blouse.’

‘I painted it originally to please myself,’ said Alain; ‘I little thought where I should use this study.’

‘Right, very right! I hate impersonal work, merely done

to order. Even in my poorest days I could hardly bring myself to do it. So this is an English landscape!' he repeated. 'Singular people, those English! Gluttonous and drunken, but not without some poetry, though paralysed as to all fine and delicate enjoyment of life, by their rigid sense of duty, is it not so, count? I picture them to myself in their lonely houses, lost in some forest, or built by their roaring sea, swallowing their muddy beer and salt beef beside a smoky hearth. . no intellectual pleasures, no gaiety, no society but their spleen. Extraordinary people!'

'There is another side to this English life, my dear master,' said Alain, laughing; 'beside the hearth, on which we will see a bright fire, if you please, is the faithful wife, loved and loving, the children, who grow up under the father's eyes, a book or gazette on the table, a friend coming in to talk over the local affairs, in which they both have a hand, or the government, of which they speak ill, without any desire to change it. The hour grows late, the little ones clamber on his knee to say good night; the servants enter; he reads a chapter of the old family Bible, in which the name of each child is inscribed, as a gift from the God in whom he believes; they end with a prayer, and go peacefully to their beds, friends with all round them.'

'Extraordinary people!' said M. Delys, again. 'And is this then your own ideal, Monsieur le Comte?'

'Terribly *bourgeois*, is it not?' laughed Alain, without gratifying the evident curiosity of the old man, who went back to his distant easel, while Edmée said, 'This then is an actual study from nature. It is charming, but your landscapes are all sad or stern, how seldom smiling!'

'I like nature best thus. When she smiles she is cruel. Hearts break, men perish, kingdoms fall, and all the while she stands with her gentle eyes and serene smile, looking on as Venus did on Psyche bound and tortured.'

'I am glad she does! One does not want one's own feelings reflected everywhere. I love flowers, because they say nothing of suffering, or evil, or sorrow to me.'

Alain looked at her with a smile. 'It is singular how often you say things which remind me of my mother,' he said. 'I wish you had known her. I think you must have loved her, and she would certainly have loved you much.'

A faint colour like that of the oleander flowers which she

was copying fluttered over Edmée's throat and cheek. 'I should have been glad if she had even loved me a little,' she murmured.

'No one will ever do that,' said Alain, and taking from his breast a miniature, he unfastened it from the chain by which it hung, looked at it and said, 'Look, that is her portrait.'

'Ah! you have it safe,' said Edmée, and then her heart gave a leap at the slip she had made. To Alain it seemed only a natural remark.

'Yes, though once I should have lost it but for—for a strange chance,' and he turned to his painting with a gloom settling on his brow. Edmée sat looking at the miniature recalling when and where she had last seen it, and her eyes grew very misty. There was a lock of hair on the opposite side of the little case: 'Germaine-Edmée de St. Aignan,' she murmured, reading aloud the name inscribed round it in seed pearls.

'Yes, her name; said Alain, looking round and noting the deep interest with which she was gazing at the likeness. '*Apropos*—you have never told me what yours is.'

'Edmée.'

'Edmée! One of hers!' and there was unmistakable pleasure in his voice. 'You see I was right in thinking there was some bond between you.'

Edmée knew that she had an opportunity at last of telling him what the bond really was. She tried to speak and found no words. 'I cannot!' she said to herself, and then aloud, 'Will you tell me some more about her?'

'I have told you so much already,' he answered, pleased yet half reluctant. 'You are such a witch that without speaking half-a-dozen words you beguile me into telling you thoughts which I had hardly shaped even to myself. How is it?'

'Because I care so much to hear,' she said in a low voice, as she held the miniature out to him. His hand touched hers; he saw her start and colour, and a sudden perception of the danger of this sweet close intimacy came upon him, a recollection that though the common belief of the students was that she was a widow, M. Delys had rather implied the contrary, and that she was perhaps as little free, yet as poorly defended by the ties, whatever they were, that bound her, as he was himself. She saw, but could not decipher his change

of countenance, and measured tone, and silently resumed her painting. Alain had to deal with the stormy and contradictory feelings in his heart as he could. It was not that he loved this girl, whom he had barely known a month; love had never suggested itself, nor ordinary gallantry from a man to a pretty woman, but she had seemed to him a charming companion; her presence was welcome to him, he turned to her with the certainty of obtaining sympathetic comprehension; the atelier would have seemed empty without her, and—though she was only a friend—the bond which held him fettered appeared even more intolerable than when De Pelven had first told him the tale which in his first hot anger had made him assert that he had no wife. Edmée did not know of this bond, and it was not a pleasant story to tell her. Possibly it might yet be loosed, and then it would be needless ever to name it. He worked in unusual silence until the hour when he usually considered himself free; when he rose to put away his brushes, Edmée, very anxious to detain him and learn what this mood meant, said, ‘Have you seen those portraits of Balmat’s in the portfolio there? I made him bring them for you to look at; they are excellent.’

Perhaps he was not sorry to stay. ‘Has Balmat been here?’ he said, ‘I was going in search of him, we have seen very little of him lately, and, by the way, how ill he is looking!’

‘Is he?’ said Edmée.

‘How! is it possible you have not noticed it?’

‘No, not at all,’ she answered, flushing under his look of surprise and reproach, and well aware that her thoughts had been exclusively occupied with someone else. She felt unreasonably angry with Alain, who turned to her with a serious look, saying more in answer to the sort of defiance with which she had spoken than the words themselves, ‘I should hardly have known him again. He must have had a terribly hard life, with no success and little hope—that steadfast patience of his is wonderful, but a man cannot live on patience—and I fear he has had little else.’

‘Do you think he has been worse off than usual?’ asked Edmée, now too anxious to feel vexed.

‘I think he has lived on a straw a day, and now is breaking down.’

‘But he gained something by working a little with a watchmaker.’

‘Do not you know that his friend left Paris some time ago?’

‘No, he never told me. Poor Balmat! Shall you see him to-day?’

‘Probably. Are these the portraits which he made in the prisons? Admirable!’

‘Some, you know, he sold; many he contrived to give to families to whom they were unspeakably precious; these he kept; they were done from memory, or very slight sketches.’ Alain examined the contents of the portfolio with great interest. Every one of these portraits suggested some tragedy. Presently Edmée saw him start, and turn to the back of the paper which he had in his hand. Balmat had only ventured to put initials to these likenesses, but Edmée saw that Alain knew whose these were.

‘Brissac-Langeac! I thought so,’ and he looked for a long time at the portrait. ‘How like the daughter!’ Then, seeing Edmée’s eyes fixed on him, though hastily turned away as he raised his own, he said, ‘Do you think Balmat would part with this? I could find him a purchaser. The daughter of this lady is now returned to Paris, she is that Madame de Blanquefort to whose husband the hôtel belonged which your M. Jobin has bought—you recollect describing his visit?’

‘Yes. She is then married?’

‘To a man twenty years older than herself, whom she loves.’

There was something in his tone which told Edmée the story of a page of Alain’s heart hitherto never seen by her.

‘She must be a beautiful woman if she be like her mother.’

‘The most beautiful I ever saw.’

Edmée felt a new, unknown anguish clutch her, so keen, so strong that all the strength of her nature rallied instinctively to meet it, and she asked with unchanged voice, ‘Did you know her in England?’

‘Yes, we first met there; they were living at Richmond; she was occupied with organising means for helping other refugees, less well off than themselves, and I was able to be of some use to her, and saw her constantly.’

Edmée guessed the rest. He saw she did. Alain de St. Aignan was a man of refined and chivalrous feeling, but no

one ever escaped totally unscathed by the sins of his time, and Madame de Blanquefort, a beautiful woman older than himself, had been the object of a passionate, respectful adoration, which had at last found vent in words. 'Do not imagine I was ever more in her eyes than a young man who, like everyone else, admired her exceedingly,' he said gravely and earnestly. 'And yet no—that is scarcely true; she proved an excellent friend to me; she showed me more esteem and kindness than perhaps she would to another. Her husband is a fine old man—between them they helped me through a dangerous crisis. It is gone by now, but I have the happiness of retaining both as my best friends.'

'Gone by?' Edmée repeated, and her wistful eyes were eloquent.

'That mad phase is assuredly gone by, but I look to Madame de Blanquefort as my best and kindest adviser. She knows the story of my life—one which, if you will, I shall tell you some day.'

Edmée made no answer. It seemed to her now that she knew why he had repelled the question of M. Delys as to his marriage. The veil which had thinly covered her eyes as to her own feelings was rudely torn away, and with a sort of despair she owned to herself that she loved him, while she was nothing to him—nothing—women endure such agonies without flinching, and Alain did not guess her secret from look or tone, though when he offered her his hand in farewell he was startled by the icy coldness of hers.

'How cold you are on this hot day!' he exclaimed, detaining the unwilling fingers. 'You spend too much time in the atelier; M. Delys never recollects that the life which suits him may not be equally good for you. Have you no friends whom you ever visit?'

The solicitude was sweet to her. 'None,' she answered, smiling. 'I have no time for friends.'

'But surely you had some formerly? Before you lived in Paris,' said Alain, with a strong desire to learn something of her history.

She shook her head. He stood looking at her for a moment. Perhaps some discovery was taking place in his mind too. 'Will you have me for one?' he asked, very gently. 'You know most of my history; I want to tell you the rest some day, and then may I not know yours in return?'

I have heard nothing, except that you are married,' he added, lowering his voice, as if fearing to touch on a painful subject.

'There is nothing worth telling,' she answered, the rosy colour flooding cheek and brow.

'Did you call me, *mon père* ?'

Alain had not heard the call, but M. Delys looked round, and Edmée went to his side. She did not look round, but she knew very well that he had taken Balmat's portfolio and was gone out of the atelier. Presently she made an excuse for doing the same, wrote a hasty note to Balmat, and sent it by a commissionnaire, who by-and-by brought her back a packet. She laid it on Alain's easel, with a slip of paper which she had fastened to it, and then said to M. Delys, whose back was turned, '*Mon maître*, a commissionnaire has brought a packet for Monsieur le Comte. Will you tell him so, if he should come back this evening ?'

Alain did return that evening, well pleased at the result of his errand to Madame de Blanquefort. Edmée was not in the atelier, and M. Delys was peevish. 'She said she wanted fresh air,' he explained, and that she should go to the Tuileries gardens. Fresh air ? I never knew her talk such nonsense before. I am bewitched this evening ; nothing prospers with me ; here has this lily dropped its petals just as I was studying how to give the gloss on them, and that leaf which I have been working on for an hour looks stiff, actually stiff. Fresh air ! as if there were not enough in a barrack of a place like this ! That rapid way of painting of yours has demoralised her ; she thinks that everybody else can get through work at the same rate. The light was absolutely perfect when this fancy seized her.'

'She shall be punished by not hearing my good news to-night,' said Alain, amused. 'Balmat's sketch—one which I showed to a friend—is sold, and well sold, and he may probably dispose of others. Besides, I have an order for one of his pictures.'

'Our good Swiss ! That is well, I am glad of it—but this leaf does not satisfy me at all,' said M. Delys, who, though one of the kindest of men, could never abstract himself from his painting when a brush was in his hand. 'No, not at all—it—'

'Who brought this here ?' asked Alain, so suddenly and sharply that M. Delys looked round startled.

‘Brought what? What are you talking of? That packet? how should I now? A commissionnaire, I believe,’ and he returned to his rebellious leaf. Alain stood with the packet open in his hand, thinking much less of the title-deeds which it contained, than of the scrap of paper, on which was written, ‘If M. le Comte de St. Aignan desire his liberty he has only to claim it.’

‘I must see Balmat,’ he said, again startling M. Delys. ‘Good evening.’

‘See as many people as you please, only do not make me start again, there is a conspiracy against me to-day, and all these flowers are in it. Whom did you say you must see?’

But Alain was gone, and Edmée returning perceived that he had found the packet, and that it was gone too. Her attempts at questioning M. Delys brought her no information; he was quite unaware that anything had passed in his atelier that day more important than the dropping of his lily petals.

CHAPTER XL.

ENTRAPPED.

THERE was so much surprise in the ‘Come in!’ with which Balmat answered Alain’s knock that it was evident visitors were scarce. The voice sounded feeble, and when Alain entered, his immediate preoccupation was driven out of his mind by the sight of Balmat lying in his bed, and looking very ill. He held out his hand with a smile, saying. ‘This is kind, I wondered whether anyone would miss me enough to come and see what had become of me.’

‘How long have you been here?’ said Alain, sitting down beside him.

‘Only since yesterday. I kept up as long as I could, but had to give in yesterday afternoon.’

‘Has no one been to look after you? Have you seen no doctor?’ asked Alain, looking round the cheerless garret.

‘Madelon has not found out that I am laid up, I fancy,

and I could not make anyone else hear without too much trouble. A doctor ! what could he do ?'

'You have worked yourself to death !'

'I believe I have,' said Balmat, quietly. 'It was all I could do.'

'Those days are past, dear old friend. Your pictures are beginning to sell.'

'Are they !' said Balmat, raising himself up, with a flush on his thin cheek, 'what do you mean ?'

Alain told him how Madame de Blanquefort had gladly paid a liberal sum for the portrait of her mother, and had ordered one of his pictures, but a look of disappointment came over Balmat's face. 'Ah . . . as a sort of second payment for the likeness.'

'No, no, why will you take it so, you provoking fellow ? Recollect I have a reputation as a connoisseur to keep up, and when she asked me if your oil paintings were as good as the crayon portraits I pledged myself for their merit.'

'It is not as a charity, St. Aignan ?'

'No, on my word. Your pictures only need once to be known to sell. I fully believe that the corner is turned, and you will be a successful man henceforward.'

'Too late. You see I am a failure to the last,' said Balmat, with a patient smile ; 'you do not understand ? No, because you will not, dear St. Aignan. Do you not see that I shall never paint another stroke ? It needs no doctor to tell me that ; I feel it,' and as Alain instinctively made some protest, 'Talk to me of yourself, that will do me more good than your kind little falsehoods.'

'Yes, I have much to say ; but Balmat, tell me—if you are as ill as you think, would you not see some of your family ? You cannot hesitate as to means ? Even if I were not here, a friend with a purse all your own, there is this money of Madame de Blanquefort's—why not try returning to Switzerland ?'

'Do not speak to me of Switzerland,' said Balmat, in a tone of sharp pain, and pressing his hand on his eyes. 'I dream of it every night—' but his look of patient cheerfulness returned immediately. 'It would make no difference in the end, only be a useless, selfish expense, and I should like, —ah, you cannot guess what it would be to me to send home this money . . . I hope I shall not live so long as to spend a

great deal of it. They have spared and pinched for me, and now, to give this pleasure at the last! God is good to me. It will seem so much to them; it will save my poor mother from always hearing that my going to Paris was a mistake in which she ought not to have encouraged me—Poor mother! there will be an empty place for ever in her heart! I have been trying to write to her—No, I must do it myself,’ as Alain with moistened eyes offered to do it for him—‘I shall manage it by-and-by, there is no great hurry, I think, and she will like to have my letter. I thought it was coming to this some time ago. There are not a great many more miles of the journey to count, I fancy. Now, yourself?’

He spoke feebly, and with pauses, but the brooding melancholy seemed all gone; the fluctuation of spirits which used to harass him, especially after mental exertion, had disappeared, yet there was no reluctance to face the truth, which forced itself more and more on Alain’s mind, that, as Balmat said, he had but few more miles of the journey of life to travel over. Privation, loneliness, the change from a free country life to Paris, disappointment and home-sickness had sapped his strength, and taken away the desire for further battle with fortune, though the gleam of prosperity which came so late was sweet to him. To Alain, in whom life was so strong that all his difficulties were rather a stimulus than a burden, and to whom after all it had been kind, giving more than it had taken away, since in depriving him of rank and state, fortune had set him free to follow successfully the art which he loved, this serene submission was unspeakably sad and painful. His distress moved Balmat with pleased grateful surprise. ‘Why, you cannot think how strange it seems that you should care so much whether I live or die,’ he said, laying his thin hand on St. Aignan’s. ‘I did not think that anyone here would, unless, perhaps well, yes, *she* would. I think I should like to be sure of her happiness,’ he added, with a wistful look at Alain. ‘It is thanks to her that I have got on till now. She has been dearer to me even than my sisters, I think.’

Alain understood that he was thinking of Edmée. ‘You asked me just now to speak of myself,’ he said; ‘if you can care to hear, I have abundance to tell. First—look here. I found these to-day on my easel—brought by a commissionaire.’

'The title-deeds of your property!' said Balmat, who, though never told, had guessed the contents of the packet.

'Yes—but that matters little. If I recover the St. Aignan estate, I must sell it; I could not live there for a hundred reasons; besides, it is heavily mortgaged. The important thing is that they were undoubtedly carried off by that rascal Leroux, and must afterwards have reached his daughter's hands. De Pelven tells me he got his deserts by the guillotine. Poor child! this restoring of them reminds me strangely of her fatal generosity when she came to warn me. There must have been something fine in her.'

'I have wondered you never named her,' said Balmat, who had given much perplexed consideration to this question since the return of St. Aignan.

'I must tell you the reason, I suppose. You thought I had forgotten her?'

'No, not that. Some might, but I do not think you could.'

'You are right, and I should have given my best efforts to finding her but for what I had already learned. She easily consoled herself in my absence. You may imagine the story—an every-day one.'

'How! Who dared lie thus? Who slandered her so to you?' exclaimed Balmat, with a flash of indignation which won a smile from Alain, in spite of himself.

'Why, you saw even less of her than I did,' he said, 'unless you met afterwards? What makes you so hot to champion her?'

'I want to know who your informant was. De Pelven? So! I knew it.'

'If you had not once said that your only women friends here were your landlady, and Delys' daughter, I should certainly think you knew this girl, Balmat.'

'I have no others,' answered Balmat, considering how far his promise of secrecy to Edmée bound him under this unexpected aspect of events. 'But I think you very ready to credit stories to the disadvantage of a girl who seems always to have acted a fine and generous part.'

'You mistrust my cousin? So do I, with no reason that I know of—but in this matter he can have no conceivable motive for deceiving me.'

'Who can say?' Balmat had resolved to betray nothing at this moment, but to communicate with Edmée. 'By what I know of him his motives are never easy to read, and there

I should disbelieve every word against her if he swore it. A girl who can act thus cannot have fallen so low.'

'Look here,' said Alain, putting the slip of paper before him.

'So!' said Balmat again. 'And what do you mean to do?'

'See her—sift the matter, if I knew how. But she has forgotten one little thing—her address.'

'So she has,' said Balmat, laughing a little. 'No doubt in her hurry and agitation that never occurred to her.'

'Hurry! agitation! You draw largely on your imagination, my friend.'

'It does not appear to me from the wording of this that she greatly desires a divorce, except to set you free.'

Alain read the words again; it was a new light to him, not a welcome one.

'Do you yourself wish it?' asked Balmat, eyeing him narrowly.

'I?—If you ask me—yes. But let that alone. In any case I am in an intolerable position—altogether false and slippery. I go about apparently a free man, while—What do you know of that daughter of old Delys? I can understand nothing of her story.'

If Alain thought that Balmat would not see the connection between the hasty outbreak with which his speech began, and the studied carelessness of the end, he was mistaken. Balmat's eyes brightened, and he said, 'Story?—Has she one? She is the best friend I ever had. People laugh at friendship between a man and woman, but I have good reason to believe in it. I wish she were happily married, for the old man has not a *liard's* worth of worldly wisdom.'

'She is free then? I thought there was some husband, alive or dead, in the way.'

'You had better ask her,' said Balmat, 'but meanwhile, if I were you, I should let this business of finding out whence the papers come rest for the present. You must surely soon hear more. No woman will stop here. Having gone so far she will take another step, especially if irritated by your silence. If I can I will get to the *Atelier du Lys* in a day or two, and learn whether anything fresh has occurred. It would be very kind if you would tell David why I am absent. Has anything happened among our fellows? Have you looked in lately?'

‘Not much, except that someone, Isnard, I think they call him, has come back, released from prison, I believe.’

‘Isnard!—That is news indeed, but do you know nothing of the causes of his imprisonment?—he has not been to see M. Delys?’

‘I should not have thought there was much friendship between Delys and that raving, ranting fellow, who seems always knitting his brows and tearing his hair, and lifting his eyes to heaven—which he does not believe in.’

‘Oh, that is the state of mind in which he has returned? and the others!—they do not spare their jeers.’

‘That you may be sure of,’ said Alain, laughing at the recollection.

‘Did he know you were the cousin of De Pelven?’

‘No, how should he? Who does but yourself?’

‘So much the better. He has a long-standing grudge against him.’

‘I do not fancy it in him to do more than bluster,’ said Alain, carelessly.

‘You are wrong. He is capable of any mischief, if piqued enough, and it could be done in a moment.’

‘I have tired you, dear Balmat. What can I do before I go?’

‘Nothing, only come again soon, unless I appear.’

‘That I will,’ said Alain, leaning over him with such tender compassion that Balmat’s eyes filled with tears.

‘Do not waste sorrow on me,’ he said, brushing them away; ‘I can die, that is not hard, and it secures me from what I have feared—’ he turned very pale, but Alain’s affectionate pressure of the hand led him on—‘it has haunted me all these years; I fought it as well as I could, but it was always there. One of my brothers things went wrong with him,—he had the same fear, and he fought too, but the battle was too hard—he—shot himself. I have thought I should end so too, do what I would, but that is gone by now, thank God.’

It was the first glimpse that Alain had ever had of those troubled depths which lay under the poor fellow’s quiet impassive manner. He could only murmur some words of deep sympathy.

‘I thought to get away from it by work, but even that seemed to turn against me; no one thought what I could do worth doing in the atelier, and it is hard to believe in oneself

against all the world ; besides, there are David's doctrines, you know—I could not work them out. But it is all over now, and I did the best I could. You two—you and Edmée have been good friends to me, and you will miss me a little—as much and more than I deserve. It is odd, too, to think how little change one's death makes in the world !—Well, *au revoir*, dear St. Aignan. Tell Madelon to come up some time to-day.'

Alain had already resolved not to leave the Maison Crocq until he had seen Madelon, and made provision that Balmat should not again be left without even a glass of water within reach. Madelon looked unpromising, and as if the illness of her lodger occurred expressly to annoy her, and Alain impatiently turned from her, and mounted to the floor where lived Edmée's old neighbours, the poor artisan and his wife, hoping to secure a kinder attendant in the woman, but while he was talking to her Madelon passed on her way up to Balmat's garret, and her voice could be heard in gentler tones than Alain had expected. Madame Amat too promised to look to Balmat's comfort, and send her husband to summon St. Aignan should he seem worse, and Alain left the Maison Crocq somewhat better satisfied with his friend's chances of care and comfort than he had expected, and took his way to the apartment where he had established himself, having soon found that he should prefer one of his own to sharing that of De Pelven, though strongly urged by his cousin to remain with him. It was not altogether a welcome sight to see De Pelven waiting for him there.

'At last ! I began to think you lost. It is nearly a week since I have seen you !—What have you been about ? How do your affairs go on ?'

'Excellently, if you speak of artistic matters.'

'And the others ? Any news of the false one ?'

'Nothing definite.'

'Some, I see. But I do not want to pry into your affairs unless I can serve you.'

Alain felt himself ungracious without reason to a man who deserved something better from him, and, except his own reluctance to admit De Pelven into his confidence, there was no reason why he should make a mystery of the event of the afternoon.

'Nothing definite, as you say,' repeated De Pelven, study-

ing the scrap of paper, which Alain had given him, while briefly narrating what had occurred. 'And now?—'

'Somehow or other she must be found.'

'I might be able to help you—I do not know. Depend on my doing all I can, and let me know what happens.'

'What have you been doing since we met last?'

'Watching men building with old materials which have been shattered to pieces. Upon my word, some people do not seem aware that there has been a revolution! By the way, you see a good deal of that young nephew of the De Blanqueforts?'

Alain assented, a good deal surprised at De Pelven's knowledge of his proceedings.

'He is running himself and them into danger. The old man is in a difficult position; he has a hot head, generous impulses, was first ultra-revolutionist, then equally violent the other way, and always for maintaining aristocracy, wanting to reform the nobles and keep them, altering nothing else. Of course he had to emigrate, and now that he has returned, he is a marked man, under surveillance. In reality he is perfectly harmless, a man who would feel bound hand and foot by his promises and engagements to Government, but the nephew?—'

De Pelven paused enquiringly, Alain said nothing.

'The nephew—as Fouché says—you know Fouché?'

'A creature like a hyena in a coat? Yes, I have seen him.'

'Fouché says that the young De Blanquefort is as hot-headed as his uncle, and weak, and easily led besides. I fancy you have been trying to keep him out of mischief, but there is no doing anything with fools, and he will be the ruin of all that family. This very day he is intending to be present at a Royalist meeting, on which Fouché is preparing to lay his hand; the police have full information, and stand laughing while these imbeciles run their heads into the trap. It is a bad business for all concerned. If I had seen you sooner I would have given you a hint not to appear in public quite so often with Edouard de Blanquefort.'

'I must find him at once,' said Alain, unheeding the warning. 'Where is he likely to be? There is a house where he often goes—the mistress is a very pretty woman, and always has a swarm of admirers round her—he may be there.'

'Very likely. In fact, I think he will be there,' said De Pelven, who was aware of what Alain did not know, that this house was a focus of political intrigue, and its mistress a fanatic Royalist. In fact, it was in her salon, under pretext of a social gathering, that the political meeting was to be held which the police were in wait for.

'You will forgive my leaving you at once? The De Blanqueforts have been excellent friends to me; I cannot let this foolish fellow destroy himself and them without trying to interpose. Thanks for the warning.'

'Do as you like, *mon cher*; for my part I should not interfere, for if the young man do not compromise them to-day he certainly will to-morrow, and you yourself as a refugee may come in for a share of the danger. But act as you think best,' said De Pelven, shrugging his shoulders; and when Alain was gone he took out his watch, looked at it, and murmured, 'It is now seven o'clock; by eight there will be twenty more people in prison than there are now, including my cousin St. Aignan.'

CHAPTER XLI.

ALAIN'S RANSOM.

'I SHOULD be very glad to know what has become of our friend,' said M. Delys, with annoyance, as he looked at the deserted easel where Alain should have been at work. 'Absent all yesterday and half to-day! He ought not to leave us thus with no explanation. I thought he might have gone into the country with De Forbin and Vincy; several of David's pupils have been organising an excursion. You know David encourages their studying landscape from time to time, but Ducis, whom I saw just now, says that he certainly did not go with them, though they waited for some time expecting him. Had you heard of any such plan?'

'Yes, he spoke of it,' said Edmée, who looked weary, and as if she had not slept, 'but he said he should come in before starting, and bid us adieu. Besides here are his colours and brushes.'

'I cannot understand it,' repeated M. Delys, who had ceased to recollect any peculiar tie between the two young occupants of his atelier, and looked on Alain simply as a very promising artist. 'I begin to think that there is something unreliable in him; that rapid way of painting which he has is unsatisfactory; he accomplishes his day's work admirably, admirably, but his method of getting through it so fast is highly demoralising to others. *Bon!* do not start so at every noise; you make me nervous, my child—you are not like yourself. There! at last I hear his step. So, Monsieur le Comte—'

'No, that is not his step,' said Edmée, who had been listening keenly; 'it is more like Balmat's, only so slow. Perhaps he can give us news of Monsieur le Comte. Good afternoon, Balmat. But oh! how ill you seem!' she cried, forgetting all else in the shock which his haggard looks gave her. 'You ought to be in your bed! You should not have come up these stairs!'

'Yes, I know it,' said Balmat, wearily, as he let himself drop on the chair which she pushed towards him. 'Only two of you here to-day?'

'As you see.'

'For a whole day and a half the Count has not entered the atelier!' exclaimed M. Delys. 'To neglect thus a painting which he is pledged to send home to-morrow! it is unheard of!'

'But you yourself, dear master—you do not always send home your paintings when they are expected,' observed Edmée, somewhat resentful of the blame cast upon Alain.

'That is a different thing. There is no resemblance whatever between the two cases,' said M. Delys, without troubling himself to explain wherein this difference consisted. 'Has he been to see you, Balmat?'

'Two days ago. He seemed much preoccupied by some business,' said Balmat, looking at Edmée, who coloured vividly. 'I have seen no one since but Isnard, the last person I expected—he came this morning in the strangest state, talking confusedly of vengeance satisfied, comrades who could jest at him no more, danger to himself, flight, and I know not what.'

'As he did when he took refuge with my aunt and me! What has happened?'

'Bah! he is a mere madman; how can you pay any attention to his folly?' said M. Delys.

'There was some reality in it this time; his terror for the consequences was unfeigned, and he wanted to borrow money—money of me!—to escape to America.'

'I hope you gave him none!'

'I had none to give. St. Aignan tells me that some is coming; but that is no matter now.'

'Ah! he has been with that Madame de Blanquefort!' thought Edmée, with the same keen pain which had seized her before; and it was with forced calmness that she said aloud, 'So your portrait of Madame de Brissac is sold then? I am very glad.'

'Yes, but that is no matter now. I did not come here to talk of myself. Look what was brought to the Maison Crocq just now, and delivered to me by a messenger who would not stay to be questioned. You see it is intended for you, not me.'

He held out a piece of paper, on which was written in an unsteady hand, 'Alain de St. Aignan is in danger. If Edmée Leroux wish to learn more, she knows to whom to apply.'

'In danger! What can this mean?' said Edmée, very pale.

'Do you know the writing?' asked Balmat, while M. Delys took the paper and examined it with exclamations of wonder and impatience.

'De Pelven's.'

'So I supposed. He doubtless assumed that I knew where you were, and that it would reach you.'

'But this is a trap, a manifest trap!' cried M. Delys. 'Does he think us so imbecile as to run into it? St. Aignan is safe enough.'

'There is a talk, Ducis tells me, of a plot among the newly-returned Royalists,' said Balmat, shaking his head. 'Some twenty or more have been arrested.'

'M. de St. Aignan can have nothing to do with that!' cried Edmée. 'His principles and his honour would all forbid it.'

'But he had friends among these men there is a young De Blanquefort of whom he has often spoken.'

'It can be nothing but the vaguest accusation!'

‘Even that may be full of danger if De Pelven wish him ill.’

‘True!’ said poor Edmée.

‘I cannot piece it together,’ said Balmat, wearily. ‘If I rightly understood Isnard while he was stamping and raving about my room he believed that he had murdered De Pelven, or at least given him a death-blow, yet here is a missive from him this afternoon.’

‘Serpents cannot be killed, unless you beat the life out of them,’ said M. Delys. ‘He gets St. Aignan out of the way, and tries to allure this child into his clutches, but he forgets she has friends now—a poor old father who will not let her run into danger.’

‘Dear master, danger or not I must see him. It is true—this story; Monsieur le Comte is in danger, and De Pelven alone can tell me where and how. Let us go.’

‘Go! and where?’ said M. Delys, bewildered.

‘To the Rue Hauteville, where M. de Pelven lives.’

‘But after all, what do we know?’

‘I shall soon know all. Come. But, dear Jacques, rest. You are worn out; you must eat and drink.’

The intensity of her agitation had calmed her. She paid no heed to Balmat’s remonstrances, but cared tenderly for his comfort, letting the confused and incoherent arguments of M. Delys pass by like idle wind. He found himself in the street before he well knew what had happened.

‘But, child, what are you about?’ he remonstrated. ‘You who until now have hidden yourself so studiously from this man! You who know so well what he is!’

‘It is true,’ she answered, in anxiety so feverish that she could not stand still as he paused, but drew him hastily along. ‘Let us find a carriage—you are coming too!’

‘Yes—yes—Ah, what a responsibility it is to be a father even an adopted father,’ sighed M. Delys, submitting to be hurried on. ‘Will you at least explain your plans?’

‘I have none, except to see De Pelven as soon as possible. There is a *fiacre*, *mon père*. Bid the driver go fast.’

Once in the *fiacre* she sat with her hands locked together, mute and motionless, taking counsel with herself, probably forgetful of the presence of her companion, who contemplated her with perplexity almost comic, asking himself if this were indeed the Edmée usually so calm and passive.

The driver obeyed orders and went fast, with the hope of a *pourboire*; the houses seemed to fly past on either side, and they had reached the Rue Hauteville, then so lonely and unfrequented that robbery and murder were not unusual events in and near it, and no one ventured through it at night unarmed, before M. Delys had decided how the step they were taking would be viewed by Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, whom Edmée had imperatively recalled the day before, and who therefore might be soon expected.

'We were so comfortable, so well settled to work! What a pity this is!' he groaned aloud, and Edmée, roused by the slackening speed of the carriage, as the driver looked about for the house indicated, answered, 'In any case my aunt's return must have ended all that. See, we are arrived.'

A porter came to answer the bell which M. Delys pulled with shaking hands and unnecessary violence. 'Who are you, who ring thus?' he asked in a surly voice. 'There is a dying man upstairs—you choose a strange time to ring such a peal. What do you want?'

'I must see M. de Pelven!' answered Edmée, at whom M. Delys had looked helplessly.

'M. de Pelven has something else to do than see visitors. Yesterday he was brought in stabbed in the back, and he has been dying ever since.'

'Dying or not I must see him.'

'And what is your name, I should like to know?'

'Madame de St. Aignan,' answered Edmée, naming herself thus for the first time.

'St. Aignan!' said the porter, hesitating and surprised. 'That is the name of another of our lodgers,' and he looked with more respect at Edmée, then turning to a servant, who came rapidly down the stairs, 'Jean, this lady asks to see thy master; she will not be refused.'

'Kindly follow me, madame,' said the man, very courteously. 'My master expects you. *Imbécile*'—to the porter—'thou hast forgotten that I told thee this very morning a lady would come, and must be at once admitted. This way, madame.'

'He knew she would come! It is some vile snare!' murmured M. Delys, following Edmée up the stairs. She turned as they entered a room into which a bed-chamber

opened. 'Stay here, dear master. You will be close by. But do not go further away.'

'Heaven forbid!' muttered M. Delys, very uneasily 'You are running into the lion's mouth, and he may as well make a meal on me too.'

Edmée, preceded by the valet, had passed on; M. Delys followed her to the open door. He could see a nurse move away, on an imperative gesture from the sick man, lying raised high on pillows, his dark glowing eyes making his corpse-like pallor more striking. Even the lips were colourless, and the hands lying on the sheet were like pale ivory. As he saw Edmée stand in the doorway, those eager eyes seemed to flash and glow with double brilliance. He waved aside the doctor, who was bending over him, and speaking in a low, warning voice.

'I have conjured you up! I knew I should,' he said, in a gasping, broken voice, which betrayed extreme weakness. 'You have come at last of your own accord to seek me. I told you once that some day you would. Do you remember?'

'M. de Pelven, where is my husband?' asked Edmée, meeting his ardent gaze unshrinking.

'Yes, I know it is for his sake that you are here,' he answered, speaking with increasing difficulty, but devouring her with his eyes. 'No matter, since you are here.'

'I asked you where my husband is?' she repeated. 'You have betrayed him.'

'I have. Hush, Gaillard, my friend,' as the doctor beside him tried to silence him. 'A little sooner, a little later, what does it matter? I am dying, and you know it. Yes, I betrayed St. Aignan, knowing that thus I should find you again. Danger threatens him. You come. It was well combined, but I calculated without this accursed dagger-stroke.'

'Will you tell me where M. de St. Aignan is? You have much to expiate—more than I know, perhaps. Tell me how to save him, and I forgive all the past.'

'Many thanks, Madame la Comtesse. But I will be paid for the service which you demand. I am dying, as you see; I have not two hours to live—is it not so, Gaillard?'

'Not half-an-hour at this rate,' answered the young physician.

'You hear. Gaillard can have no interest in deceiving

you. Besides, you did not come alone ; I heard another step out there. Stay with me for the short time I have to live—there, in that arm-chair I do not ask much, you see, and I will give you the means of saving St. Aignan, I will, on the faith of a gentleman.'

She hesitated ; the physician whispered 'Do not refuse ; he is dying fast ; I shall be near, and it is a dying man's last fancy.'

It was much more, and Edmée knew it. The repugnance with which she remained here was indescribable ; she trembled under the singular gaze of those fixed eyes, which seemed to draw her towards him, and overmaster her will. But St. Aignan ! She met De Pelven's gaze proudly and calmly, and sat down beside him, as he had directed.

'That is well,' he murmured, with a long sigh. 'Thus I shall see you to the last.' And his face relaxed into relief and satisfaction ; there was a strange tenderness in the expression which stole over it. 'It is thus that you would have watched me if you had been my wife, but you would have wept for me too ; you will not do that ? No. I should have liked to see you spend a few tears for me. But stay, do not move ; what are the dreams of a dying man ? I should have loved you well, child, better than that man whom you called just now your husband ever will. I never loved any other woman. I have courted many You are the first whom I could not win How was it ? What made you turn from me at Mortemart half won ?'

'You call that love !'

'Yes, Edmée ; you do not believe it, you do not understand it, for you are still a child. I loved you for the proud innocence which you would have lost had you listened to me ; I have betrayed you, I have slandered you, but I loved you.'

'Do not deceive me again ! You promised to tell me where M. de St. Aignan is,' implored Edmée, alarmed at the increasing faintness of his voice.

'Do you believe that he loves you ?'

'What does it matter ! No ! He does not love me, perhaps he never will, but I will save him, I must, do you hear ?'

'You have met since he returned !' exclaimed De Pelven, with excitement which lent a passing strength. 'It is not

the old romantic desire to save a St. Aignan that spoke there. 'Where have you met?'

She made no answer. 'I should like to unravel this web,' he murmured, with a half smile at himself. 'It is hard to leave so promising a mystery unread.' And he seemed lost in speculating over what she had just said, and putting what he knew or guessed together. She looked round in silence. The disorder of the room spoke eloquently of the moment when the wounded owner had been carried in. The day waned; its last rays mingled with those of a lamp, lighted perhaps to seal or burn papers; its pale light gave a strange, unearthly aspect to the corpse-like face of the dying man, now breathing with audible effort. 'Ah!' he whispered suddenly, in a tone of passionate regret, 'I cannot see clearly;' and he passed his hand over his eyes, as if once more to enable them to see the face so soon to become invisible to him for ever. 'Well, I keep my promise—he is in the Conciergerie, and there, in that casket, you will find the means, if you like—what do I care now? While I lived it amused me a little, but now—'

A sort of remorse visited Edmée. 'Alas!' she said, 'it is impossible to have a priest, but think—'

'A priest! For me!' said De Pelven, and the idea seemed so sovereignly amusing to him that he laughed softly. 'For me! Bah! one dies as one has lived—Voltaire said it. All I ask is that hell, if there be one, may not resemble this world.'

'But it is not yet too late,' urged Edmée, with a feeling that if he would only express some contrition there might be a sort of hope.

'Child! Is the heaven you believe in so easily entered that a few pious thoughts now, when life is ending, will open its gates? If I got there, what should I do in such a region? Is there anything in me which seems to you to fit me for it?—Should I find you there? and would you be willing to be met by me when you arrived by-and-by?—How should I accept now fables which I have never credited? If there be anything to learn, I shall learn it soon, if not—why trouble myself about it? You have some concern for me then?'

Edmée drooped her head, dumb before the sarcastic, smiling scepticism of this deathbed. Her own faith seemed to

fold its wings and shrink, even while, full of self-reproach, she sought what to say that might reach his heart.

'You do indeed divide us for ever!' she murmured.

'There is no need to bid me believe in hell since I leave you to De St. Aignan!' he answered, 'but I keep my word—The casket.'

Thinking that he wanted something out of it she took the little box, unlocked it, and found it full of papers. His gesture showed her which to take out, and a glance showed her that it was a list of names.

'Fouché seized most, not all, he cannot discover who they are,' she heard De Pelven say, and she looked enquiringly at him.

'You mean that this is the list of some still unknown to the police, who were mixed up in this plot? that I can get M. de St. Aignan released in exchange for giving up this? And how is it that *you* know them? Did you organise this conspiracy and then draw back and leave these men to perish?—It is treason!' cried Edmée, starting up. A faint red flushed De Pelven's sallow cheek. He could not speak audibly now, but his eyes with their still vivid light dwelt on her countenance.

'Is this what you meant? Shall I buy my own happiness by making the mothers, the wives of these men as miserable as I am now? How should I dare meet my husband if I had freed him thus? There is nothing in all the world that Alain de St. Aignan thinks worth a crime!'

While she spoke with fevered vehemence she was holding the paper in her trembling fingers to the lamp; it shrivelled into black charred fragments. Still trembling with excitement she turned to the bedside. 'M. Gaillard!' she cried in terror, for De Pelven was vainly struggling to raise himself, or to breathe. The doctor was stooping over him before his name had escaped her; the sick nurse and M. Delys hurried in. Nothing could be done to relieve those last struggles.

'Come away, my poor child,' said the old man, exceedingly agitated, 'This is dreadful.'

'I promised to stay to the end,' answered Edmée, pressing her hands on her heart, whose beating seemed choking her. The dying man heard her, for he smiled.

'Here to the last,' he breathed, too faintly to be heard,

and his hand moved feebly as if to seek hers. 'And if not mine, at least not his.'

There was silence among them all; Edmée looked at the impalpable fragments of what might have been St. Aignan's ransom.

'It is over,' said the physician's voice. 'You have the consolation, madame, of having fulfilled his last wish.'

'Come, come, my daughter,' repeated M. Delys, taking her death-cold hands in his, 'You tremble like a leaf.'

Not more than the poor old man did himself. She let herself be drawn from the room, while the nurse and physician were speaking apart.

'He is in the Conciergerie. I might have saved him, but it cost too much,' she said like one in a dream.

'How! in the Conciergerie? St. Aignan?'

'Yes, it cost too much. He would have been the first to say so. Ah, take me home, take me home, dear master.'

CHAPTER XLII

A FRIEND AT COURT.

ON reaching the Louvre M. Delys and Edmée involuntarily avoided the salon, which they were accustomed to associate with society and conversation, though since the departure of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan it had been empty enough, and passed into the atelier, where they expected to find Balmat, but instead of being met by the young Swiss, it was the face and voice of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan which greeted them. Their surprise was great, since she had given them no reason to expect her return so soon, and could not yet have received the letter which Edmée had impetuously sent off after learning the existence of Madame de Blanquefort.

'Here I am,' she said, holding out her arms to Edmée.

I could no longer do without you, and I longed to embrace my nephew, otherwise I was so well pleased yonder that decidedly I should be there still. I went exactly at the right

time. Earlier I might have been subject to annoyance, for the reaction caused by the *émigrés'* return was rather too strong, they seemed to think themselves masters of the situation, as if there never had been a revolution at all; on this the Republicans lift up their heads; the club Salm is opposed to that of Clichy; proscriptions recommence; we have not done with them, I fear, but only rumours reached me . we have no gazettes at Mortemart.'

'Dear aunt!—It is not then my letter which brought you back?'

'Letter? no! I never got it—You could not imagine the joy we feel, we, so marvellously escaped from death, at meeting again. Those whose very name one scarcely knows seem old friends we congratulate each other on being alive; we help one another—it is the golden age—metaphorically. Few have much of the actual metal left. It will not last, I know it, but for the moment it is very sweet,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, so full of the subject which had engrossed her during her absence, that as yet she could speak of nothing else.

'But where is Balmat?' asked M. Delys, equally occupied with his own concerns, and therefore feeling all this wearisomely indifferent. 'We left him here.'

'Ah, that poor Balmat! how miserably ill he seems! I met him crawling downstairs, he would not remain lest he should be unable to get home, and all I could learn was that he had not seen my nephew to-day, and that you both were absent. Where have you been? Let me look at you, *mignonne*. Ah!—Pray monsieur, what have you been doing with this child, whom I trusted to you?' she asked, turning impetuously on M. Delys. He could only answer by a deprecating gesture, and stood looking like a criminal before his judge.

'Where is my nephew? Speak, monsieur!'

'In the Conciergerie.'

'How! in the Conciergerie! What does this mean?'

'He has been arrested on the accusation of conspiring against the Government, falsely of course; there can be no question of that,' said M. Delys, hoping to break the news gently. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan fell upon him instantly. 'Heavens! what is the use of such unnecessary details? how can you take so long to tell a simple story? do I not know

that the accusation is false? Go on, monsieur, I beseech you, or no, you speak, *mignonne*; men never can explain anything.'

'We do not know much,' said Edmée, quietly, but there was a pallor and contraction of the muscles round her mouth, and livid circles round her eyes which betrayed the sufferings through which she had been passing. 'M. de Pelven'—she shuddered as she named him—'organised or at least knew of this plot, and found means of involving Monsieur le Comte in it, though he had nothing whatever to do with it.'

'I should think so! My nephew has too much sense, though he is his father's son, to mix himself up with such ill-timed folly. If the Royalists succeeded in bringing back the Bourbons, could they keep on the throne a week, when all is drifting anchorless? To wait is their only policy. But if, as you declare, De Pelven has got my nephew into the Conciergerie, he is bound either to get him out or to go there too. I shall go at once and tell him so. I presume that at last you will permit me to communicate with that poor De Pelven?'

'Alas! dear aunt, how shall I tell you M. de Pelven was brought home yesterday, wounded——'

'Another duel! That foolish fashion is reviving, one hears of duels on all sides. Everyone has something to avenge, and Messieurs les Royalists are perpetually challenging those who denounced their families or bought their lands.'

'It was not a duel.'

'What then? An assassination! You do not mean it! What is known?'

'You recollect Isnard, and that poor girl, Laure, and his vows of vengeance for her death? He had made himself obnoxious to M. de Pelven, escaped,—she was arrested in his place and perished.'

'I recollect it all,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, her usual tone of good-humoured irony changing to one much graver; 'it was then to De Pelven that he alluded, and he has paid his debt thus! And my cousin, was he seriously hurt? What!' as a look and sign from Edmée answered clearly enough—'you do not mean that he is dead? Dead! And how do you know all this?'

Edmée had no choice but to tell the history of that strange meeting and gloomy parting, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan listened with profound astonishment.

‘So you were right, he was not to be trusted, she said at last. ‘Who knows’—and her mind glanced over the past rapidly putting all which she knew together.

‘I would willingly believe that he did a good and disinterested action in procuring my release from the Luxembourg,’ she added presently, ‘but who can say? So he loved you enough to risk so much, sin so greatly for your sake as this! De Pelven capable of a *grande passion*, and for you, *mignonne*!’

She looked at Edmée with odd interest and respect. That such a man as De Pelven should have loved her evidently raised her in the eyes of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. She had the assurance which she had longed for, that the village girl could fascinate as if she had been born a great lady.

‘My poor child, you have suffered very much, and kept it all to yourself. As for my nephew, we must take counsel what to do; it is impossible that there should be any proofs against him, and now, thank Heaven, people are not condemned without proofs. He cannot have escaped so many dangers to fall under a false accusation. It is unfortunate that just now so bitter a feeling should have been reawakened by the indiscretion of the nobles who have returned. As I travelled I heard two men talking over public affairs, and one mentioned that General Augereau had ordered that anyone in his division who verbally or in writing used the word *monsieur* should be expelled from the army! Judge from that! But we are not such fanatics in Paris. If I only knew someone in power!’

‘M. de St. Aignan studiously avoided all political society,’ said Edmée. ‘He said that as an artist he had no occasion to concern himself with politics; besides, the Republicans are now passing just such measures as a despotism might; forbidding the liberty of the press, punishing men for their private convictions—’

‘You are well acquainted with what is passing, *ma belle*. How did you learn it?’

‘I have heard M. de St. Aignan speak of it.’

‘To whom?’

‘To me,’ answered Edmée, with a sigh which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan could not understand. She was thinking how sweet those conversations had been, until she heard of Madame de Blanquefort. Alain’s assurance that his passion had been but midsummer madness made far less impression

than the fact that he had loved this beautiful, unknown enchantress, who had returned to Paris.

There was a long silence. M. Delys had sat silent and ruffled, very resentful of the set-down which he had so undeservedly received at the hands of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, and greatly shaken by the agitation of the last hours. He was forced to acknowledge to himself that he had grown an old man, and could not bear such a strain without suffering from it. He now rose, lighted a lamp, for the studio had grown dark, and began to walk up and down it. Scarcely, however, had he reached the further end where stood the easel on which he expected to see the canvas upon which he had been engaged before Edmée hurried him away than he uttered a cry of terror, startling his companions out of their troubled reverie.

'Someone has been here during my absence! I am robbed! I am a lost man!' he exclaimed in an agony, seizing his wig convulsively, and standing as if transfixed before the easel, widowed of the beautiful painting which he had left upon it. Edmée started up and went to him, and laughter returned to the eyes of Mademoiselle de St. Aignan as she more deliberately followed her.

'My picture! my picture! my flowers! where are my flowers? he stammered, looking with despair around him. *Ma fille* mademoiselle where is my painting?'

'But dear master, dear father, it is impossible that you should have been robbed of it,' remonstrated Edmée, amid his incoherent exclamations. 'Balmat was here, it seems, up to the very time of my aunt's arrival; who could possibly have taken——'

'There have been thieves here, I tell you! the canvas is gone!' repeated M. Delys.

'You are quite right,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, shaking her head with mock gravity and condolence. 'Great ladies are sometimes arrant thieves, dear monsieur, where paintings are concerned, and they lose patience. Someone who expected that picture to be finished six months ago, and who has waited perhaps twelve—such a little while, you know!—and who says that she has besought, threatened, implored all in vain, came at last in person and took it.'

'But this is infamous! It is a scandalous theft, it deserves the guillotine!' exclaimed the old artist, going and

coming as he spoke like one possessed. 'My reputation is lost? I intended to bring that picture to perfection; there was another year's work in it!'

'Precisely, and that was what Madame Bonaparte feared!'

'Indeed it was perfect already, dear master!' added Edmée.

'There was a year's more work to do! What do I say? A year! two! three!—I shall go and demand my picture back; I will recover it at once; it is mine, it is no one's but mine!'

'You will do nothing of the sort, my good friend,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, laying a firm hand on him, 'or at all events you will wait for to-morrow. Listen to me; do you not see how *apropos* this is? You shall go to the Rue Chautereine when we have thought it all well over, and say whatever you please as to your flowers, but above all you will speak to her of my nephew, and explain that he is a painter, a *bond fide* artist, not one who has merely taken it up as a *gagne pain*, as my friend De Chalys took up making india-rubber shoes in exile—and that he has no interest in politics. You will surely know what to say to this lady, who adores flowers, it seems; speak too of Edmée here, and say that she helped you a little in that beautiful group which——'

'Which might have been beautiful but for this abominable proceeding.'

'You will say that Edmée implores her to grant her an interview, and try to imagine yourself speaking to a queen—they say that Madame Bonaparte loves to grant favours, it is so royal!—And besides she seems truly amiable. Moreover, her husband is ambitious; some say that he aims at supreme power, though he leads so quiet a life at present——'

'He, mademoiselle! are you speaking of General Bonaparte? a fierce Republican!'

'That remains to be seen. Some say he is more like Caesar than Brutus. It is unfortunate that he appears to detest the *émigrés* no wonder, with their harangues, and their brochures, and their denial of his military glory. Stay—suppose instead of asking an audience we assumed the privilege, and the child went with you? You would not fear, my child?'

'Nothing could be so terrible as this afternoon,' said Edmée, smiling faintly.

'Madame Bonaparte is living Rue Chauteraine. She is really very gracious, very elegant, and how the widow of a Beauharnais could so *déroger* as to marry a little Corsican officer passes my comprehension. But that is her affair, not ours.'

'How, mademoiselle !' interrupted M. Delys again, 'you call Bonaparte, our deliverer, our Alexander, a little Corsican officer !' he spoke with absolute horror, for Bonaparte was now the popular idol, and had awakened an absolute frenzy of enthusiasm by his escapes in his Italian campaign.

'She spent some time in the atelier,' continued Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as if he had not spoken, 'and greatly admired your work, my little one. I told her you were the adopted daughter of our kind friend here.'

'Mademoiselle ! It seems to me that "daughter" alone would have been sufficient,' exclaimed M. Delys.

'Would you have me tell a little lie, my dear monsieur ? And after all,' for she perceived that he was really wounded, 'after all, you dear, good, unreasonable man, the word only shows that she is your child by choice and affection, not merely by nature—is it not so ?'

'Thanks, mademoiselle,' said the old man, soothed and grateful, and he kissed her hand, while Edmée slid her slender fingers into his with a loving touch.

'You have taught me to feel there can be sweetness in the name of father,' she whispered, as she leant her head on his shoulder.

'There was an old friend of my nephew's with Madame Bonaparte, who seems intimate with her,' resumed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, a Madame de Blanquefort.'

'Madame de Blanquefort here ! That too !' murmured Edmée, feeling as if on this day every possible pang was to be endured. 'Did she expect to find Monsieur le Comte here ?'

'Apparently. A very agreeable woman of the best society. I enjoyed the half-hour these ladies spent here much. It seems that the mother of Madame de Blanquefort was in prison at the same time as Madame Bonaparte, and was very kind to her. This naturally makes a bond between them. We had a great deal of talk about my nephew, who seems to have had a home with the De Blanqueforts when in England.'

'Let us go, dear child ; I was forgetting my poor picture,' said M. Delys, 'do not let us lose another moment.'

‘My poor Edmée, are you able for this effort? Wait till to-morrow, we will do without this bad man, but we will not keep him in torture any longer. You are worn out,’ said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, tenderly.

‘No, no, dear aunt; Monsieur le Comte’s safety is surely as important as a painting, and if the one cannot wait, no more can the other. Let us go, *mon maître*.’

‘But if you are not fit for the exertion?’ hesitated M. Delys, conscience-stricken. She put him aside impatiently, feeling as if this lingering were intolerably cruel. ‘Only let us go, dear master, only let us go’—and he followed her with a wistful, crestfallen look, feeling as if he had forgotten his Edmée for the moment in his anxiety for the still dearer child which his genius had created, and of which he had been so cruelly bereft. Mademoiselle de St. Aignan remained alone, in deepening anxiety. The pleasant excitement of her return, the meeting with Edmée and M. Delys, even the unexpectedness of the ill news which awaited her, had kept her from realising the greatness of Alain’s peril. She could not know how serious it was, for the Directory had been greatly alarmed by the elections, which were highly favourable to the Royalist interest; the acquittal of Michaux, arrested for having published an *éloge* on the Bourbons, and the crowds of *émigrés*, who, with or without passports, were flocking back to France and openly avowing their intention of overthrowing the Republic, and Barras was on the watch to crush the first movement among them. This plot in which St. Aignan had become involved had exploded prematurely, like so many others formed by the Royalists, and was but a forerunner of many more, destined to culminate in the unhappy and disastrous struggle of the 17th of Fructidor. Meanwhile the Directory was eager to make an example which should terrify all malcontents, and the position of all concerned in this abortive conspiracy was dangerous in the extreme. De Pelven had foreseen its failure as soon as he saw the headlong rashness of its leaders, and withdrew quietly from all concern in it, handing over most of the information in his hands to his old ally Fouché, but keeping a part to himself, with his usual caution, as a reserve force to be used as suited him. Such novices in political movements as the members of the club of Clichy showed themselves were below his interest. Although none of this was known to Mademoiselle de St.

Aignan, her spirits sank as she sat awaiting the result of Edmée's interview with Joséphine, and she passed several very *mauvais quarts d'heure* indeed. Bonaparte was not in Paris, though he had sent thither Augereau, one of his generals, to, as it were, represent him; she might have little or no influence with anyone who could influence Alain's fate. Augereau was known to be, in popular parlance, 'fort prononcé dans les idées du moment.' There was little hope that she could work on him. But then a whisper of consolation came with the sudden recollection that rumour asserted her to be on very friendly terms with Barras, perhaps the most powerful of the five Directors. All the hope which Mademoiselle de St. Aignan dared admit seemed there, and it was not great when she remembered that one of David's pupils who was an ardent Republican had quoted a few weeks before in her salon a speech which he had heard Barras make more than once to the effect that he was daily hoping to march against all conspirators who endangered the Republic, and drive the *émigrés* into the Seine. The faint lamplight scarcely struggled against the darkness which seemed to have filled the atelier, and press upon it; the high window stood blank and pale at the further end. Unable to bear it any longer, she had risen to go to her salon, and was standing with the lamp in her hand when at last the silence was broken by steps coming to the door. It opened, and admitted Edmée and M. Delys. She could not speak, but lifted the lamp, so as to throw the light on their faces.—'Ah! thank Heaven!' she exclaimed, before they could say a word, sinking down again on her chair, overcome by the sudden relief from the strong tension of suspense.

'Yes, yes, dear mademoiselle, we have good hope,' said M. Delys, as he shut the door cautiously. 'The less said the better, but we have great hope.'

'You need not tell me that, monsieur; I have seen it in this child's face,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, as Edmée knelt besides her, and laid her head on her breast with a close and eloquent clasp. 'But tell me all—all, do you hear, from the beginning.'

'But, mademoiselle, since men never can explain anything—' answered M. Delys, maliciously.

'True—speak, *ma petite*. Heavens! what a time I have been spending! Decidedly Purgatory is no fiction: I surely

have had my share to-day. Now, *ma belle*—you have never so well deserved the title,’ added Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, smiling, as she looked at the sweet face of Edmée, radiant with such shy, tender happiness as indeed lent it a beauty such as it had never had before.

‘Well, dear aunt . . . we reached the Rue Chauteraine, and were at once admitted ; M. Delys explained why he had come, and that was talked over, and then he introduced me ; Madame Bonaparte said, “Your adopted daughter, monsieur ?” and I—there was no help for it—I said, “Ah, madame, and the wife of M. de St. Aignan, who is in great danger—” I got no farther, for a second lady, who was present, exclaimed, “How ! the young Comtesse de St. Aignan whom I have heard of from Monsieur le Comte ?”—’

‘Madame de Blanquefort ?’

‘Precisely ; how kind and amiable she is, my aunt ; it would have been much harder to tell our story but for her ; she helped me on, and knew so much that it was easy to tell all. Madame Bonaparte is most gracious and fascinating, but Madame de Blanquefort is good—I feel it. So, to show how M. de St. Aignan had been betrayed I had to relate everything, and presently Madame de Blanquefort exclaimed, “I see it all !—he has been trying to keep that unfortunate boy Edouard out of harm ; we have vainly warned him—” She had scarcely spoken when her husband, the old General de Blanquefort was announced, such a handsome, grand old man, *ma tante*, and even in all his distress so gentle and courteous—he came to say that he had had orders from the police to leave Paris at once ! Imagine how sad, only just returned, to be sent out again into exile !’

‘And of how many more will it be the history !’

‘Madame Bonaparte wept, and Madame de Blanquefort seemed not to know whether to grieve most for her husband or his nephew, or Monsieur le Comte ; I heard her say aside, “A second exile will cost my husband’s life—” and while we were all in consternation there came in General Hoche, such a handsome, gallant soldier, my aunt ; even then I could not but look at him and think of his splendid successes—of course the cause of our distress was told him, and I assure you he looked very serious, but when he heard the name of St. Aignan he started more, I dare say, than he does at a cannon-shot.’

‘How ! he knows my nephew !’

‘Monsieur le Comte served under him for a time, and greatly aided him by a sketch which he had made of a fortress on the Rhine. “What, St. Aignan accused of conspiracy !” he cried, “I would answer for his patriotism as for my own. No harm shall happen to him, or I lose my own head !” and then it was all discussed, and he said he should use all his influence for Monsieur le Comte, while Madame Bonaparte should intercede for the De Blanqueforts with Barras. And then we took leave.’

Mademoiselle de St. Aignan asked many questions before she was satisfied, and exacted minute details of the interview.

‘I believe we may hope,’ she said at last. ‘Hoche is in a high position ; he has not only served brilliantly on the Rhine, but has pacified La Vendée. Why, he seems a paladin, *petite !*’

‘So he is, mademoiselle ; I cannot understand how he can be sprung from the people,’ said M. Delys. ‘A Bayard !—a Roland !’

‘How do you know that Roland was not sprung from the people too, monsieur ?—*Apropos*—your picture ? Have you brought it back ? I do not see it.’

‘Mademoiselle,’ began the old painter, with embarrassment.

‘How ! you have consented to leave it ?’

‘What can one do when a lady is deaf to reason, mademoiselle ? And when Madame Bonaparte said that she desired as much to keep it as I myself could she is so irresistible, Madame Bonaparte

‘I said just now that I hoped ; I may say now that I am certain all will go as we desire, dear monsieur, for if Madame Bonaparte can cajole you out of a picture she can assuredly seduce Barras into sparing a life or two. Is it not so, *ma charmante ?*’

‘I was surprised to see Madame de Blanquefort so old,’ was Edmée’s irrelevant answer. ‘She must be twice my age.’

‘At least. A charming woman, is she not ?’

‘*Mais oui* ; she would help one gladly in trouble ; I could always go freely to her, I think,’ said Edmée, in whom the jealousy which had so tortured her had been, she scarcely knew how, utterly quenched by the sight of her rival. She felt entirely convinced that Alain’s passion for her had, as he said, changed into true and tender friendship and esteem,

such as she herself could have readily given, and the certainty of this had been bliss even without the good hope of Alain's release which she had brought away from the Rue Chauteraine.

'Come, we have stayed here long enough,' said Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. 'You will not see me here again for some time, I assure you. I shall always recollect with horror the time I spent here awaiting your return !'

'So much the better !' muttered M. Delys audibly. 'If Mademoiselle de St. Aignan came here often I should have to find another studio, for wherever she is a little court springs up round her !—My poor picture ! But now I can devote myself to these,' and, oblivious of everything but art, he took the lamp from the table, and stood lost in contemplation before another half-finished group of flowers, and only too late awoke in consternation to the knowledge that he had allowed the two ladies to make their way, laughing, as best they could up the narrow stairs leading to their salon in total darkness.

'Monstrous !' he said, standing with a bewildered air, as if not quite sure it were he himself who had been guilty of this *lèse politesse* ; 'I am a bear, an owl, I know it, but such a *distraction* as this is beyond permission. What can I say ? What can I do ?' and he hurried upstairs to the salon, where Edmée was writing a hurried note to re-assure Balmat, and Mademoiselle de St. Aignan was comfortably settled in an arm-chair whose vast proportions showed that it dated from days when the pitiless Greek seats were unknown in France.

'Ah, mademoiselle ! what can I say ?' he began, with the lamp in one hand and his wig in the other, having removed it under the impression that he was taking off his hat, and an air of contrition and despair beyond words. 'You know me of old ; your goodness will possibly excuse me, but never, never can I forgive myself. To let you mount the stairs alone, in darkness I am capable of anything. Only yesterday I lit this lamp with an assignat of a hundred francs, and boiled my inkstand instead of an egg ; but that was no matter—while this ! Dare I hope that even your indulgence will overlook such discourtesy, mademoiselle ?'

'My dear friend !' exclaimed Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, on whom light had gradually broken as he proceeded, 'how relieved I am ! I really feared from your remorse that you had again yielded to temptation, and committed a good action !'

CHAPTER THE LAST

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

‘COME, come, you are putting a fever into every petal of those flowers ! There is no calm, no repose in what you are doing,’ said M. Delys impatiently, as he flung down his own brush with an air of vexation. ‘I can see that from where I sit. I have almost caught it myself, unhappy child ; thanks to you, these three days I have done nothing worth doing. Now you see what it is to be beguiled into interesting oneself with the petty trifles of human life. I repeat to you, that an artist ought to live in a calm and lofty atmosphere, consecrating himself to works which will live a thousand years after these passing matters are forgotten. If I may be said to succeed, is it not because I studiously refrain from allowing myself to be disturbed by thinking of other people’s interests ? because I concentrate myself on my art, and never permit anything . . . Ah ! my dear Count, my dear son, you are given back to us ! Ah, I hardly dared hope for this happiness !’ cried the old man, rising tremulous with joy, and holding out his hands to M. de St. Aignan.

Edmée had risen too, with a cry of rapture which she forgot to suppress in the ecstasy of joy at seeing him stand before her. Their eyes met, but his were full of deep sadness, and though he answered affectionately to the congratulations of his old friend, he did not look like a man restored almost beyond hope to friends and liberty. M. Delys saw nothing of this, and soon hastened away with a sign which told Edmée that he was gone to carry the good news to Mademoiselle de St. Aignan. She dared not try to resume her painting, her hand shook so much that it would have been a vain attempt, and she knew that it would have been only natural to ask St. Aignan questions on what had occurred, and how his freedom had been regained, but her voice was even less to be trusted than her hand, and it sounded unnaturally cold and constrained when she said, feeling the pause insupportable as he stood looking down upon her, ‘Have you seen Balmat ? He will be very glad.’

‘Yes, I have seen him. Poor fellow ! he judged his state only too well.’

There was silence again. She was asking herself what could be the explanation of these grave and almost stern looks, this want of all warmth.

It was Alain who now broke the pause, by saying in a tone of studied calmness, 'I am very glad to see you alone for a moment. First, I ought to tell you that I am here only to bid you farewell. Yes—listen for a moment; this explanation is due to you as well as to myself.'

'You are banished!'

'Self-banished, lest I prove a traitor, not to my country, but myself.'

'Madame Bonaparte has betrayed me!' Edmée said to herself. 'He knows who I am. And yet why—why?'

But she found no answer to that question, and could only look up to him with eyes of wonder and pathetic reproach.

'That I was imprisoned you know,' he continued, losing in spite of himself the self-control which he had sought to maintain, 'but you do not know how I have been delivered. Hoche came to see me at the Conciergerie. Hoche was always my truest friend, and heard all that I could tell; I was afterwards summoned before Barras and Larivrellière-Lepaux, and closely questioned. I could not deny that I had once been present at a meeting of the club Clichy, but fortunately it was on an occasion when some of the members spoke with absurd injustice against the military genius of Bonaparte. I, who have been in Italy, could but ridicule this. My dissent from the popular feeling enraged them, and I believe I ran some danger. Hoche had learned this, and made it tell in my favour. Barras wanted information on some of those present that night which I did not choose to give—I am not accustomed to act the rôle of spy for any party—and I was sent back to the Conciergerie. To my great surprise I was this morning informed that I was free, and even more surprised at an intimation that I was to visit Madame Bonaparte before returning home.'

He stopped. Edmée murmured something unintelligible.

'She received me with charming grace, saying that my friends the De Blanqueforts would not suffer from their nephew's share in this plot, and that she could not regret the mistake which had occasioned my short imprisonment, since it had enabled her to serve me, and to make the acquaintance of my wife.'

He looked at Edmée, saw her pale and trembling, and resumed with vehement bitterness, 'No wonder you are astonished; you recollect doubtless that the first time I entered this atelier, where the happiest days I have ever known have been spent, I disclaimed having any wife! At least say that you do not believe I wilfully deceived you!'

'That is impossible,' she answered faintly.

'Thanks for that kind word,' said Alain, seizing her hand. 'Ah, if you did but know—if I only had the right'—the suppressed and intense emotion with which he spoke thrilled her, she gazed up at him in suspense, making no attempt to withdraw her hand.'

'Help me to say nothing, Edmée!—or no, rather let me tell you my history before we part—I leave Paris to-night.'

She made a mute sign of assent. He resolutely dropped the slender fingers which he had clasped, and put his hand over his eyes, speaking rapidly. 'Some six years ago like all the world I was about to be arrested. From prison to the guillotine there was but one step. A young girl of St. Aignan, a child of fifteen or sixteen perhaps, came to warn me, and was detected. What could a man of honour do but marry her and take her out of reach of her furious relations? They let us go; I took her to the only relative of mine left in France, obliged myself to quit the country at once, but fully intending to return as soon as possible, and complete the civil marriage by such a one as the Church requires.'

'But this girl could not hold you bound by a mere civil bond,' stammered Edmée.

'But I viewed myself as bound,' answered Alain, with sternness which betrayed his inward combat. 'I had intended to go to Mortemart, a little town where I had left her, before even thanking David, but I met my cousin De Pelven——'

'Who hindered you!' exclaimed Edmée, in a tone of such indignant pain that Alain, misapprehending its meaning, could scarcely continue.

'He had already given me news of her—such as it was—my aunt dead, my wife disappeared—it is useless to repeat the story.'

'He slandered her? And you believed what he said?'

'Like a fool—no, like an honourable man, who could not suspect such base treachery in the man who feigned to be

anxious for the honour of our family, who had done his best to have it respected——’

‘Honour! Did he even know what the word meant?’ said Edmée, trying to command herself.

‘I owe him this above all the rest, that he has gone beyond my reach, and there is no reckoning with the dead,’ said Alain, between his teeth.

‘Then this was why you said you had no wife?’ said Edmée, relieved from that weight of perplexity, but still burning with indignation against her calumniator.

‘I told myself that she no longer existed for me; that I should never marry; I little guessed that I myself should turn traitor to this noble girl. From what Madame Bonaparte tells me she must be in Paris, and with my aunt. I know not why she would say no more. My course is clear; De Pelven probably deceived me as to the sale of the property at Mortemart; I shall at all events surely learn something there which will enable me to trace her.’

Edmée understood. He would not, could not go without this explanation; he felt that he owed her this veiled confession of a love which perhaps he had himself only realised when this barrier appeared to rise unexpectedly between them; he had studiously avoided asking even by look if she returned it, but every change of countenance, every tone betrayed unutterable regret and pain. Her heart beat with joy that he should thus act as much as with the happiness which she scarcely dared face.

‘Farewell!’ he said low, bending over her. ‘I have little indeed to offer to this poor child, but I must seek her, and my good aunt.’

‘There is no need to seek far,’ interrupted a voice laughing through tears; Mademoiselle de St. Aignan had entered unseen, followed by M. Delys, and was holding out her hands to him. ‘My dear, dear nephew! you are restored to us!’

It was one of those meetings both sweet and bitter of which there were then so many. Both had passed through such trial and peril that they met as two saved from shipwreck might, incredulous of each other’s safety and of their own.

‘Ah, my dear Count, thank this good friend who—now do not begin to contradict me monsieur; but for this bad

habit you would be the most perfect, the most devoted, self-sacrificing friend in the world.'

'I! good heavens, what injustice!' cried the poor painter, lifting up his hands appealingly.

'And do not forget your bride for your old aunt,' added Mademoiselle de St. Aignan, half-laughing, half-weeping.

'No, I am not so ungrateful,' answered Alain, but in spite of himself he looked for her whom he still believed to be the daughter of M. Delys. Their eyes met, and instead of the expression which he desired, perhaps, even while he feared to discover, he saw her smile and blush with shy, exquisite happiness, as she held out her hand.

'Thanks to this dear child,' began Mademoiselle de St. Aignan——

'How! it is you! it is you, Edmée!' he exclaimed, dizzy with the sudden joy which flashed upon him. 'There are things one dares not believe!'

'You have waited until now to discover her! To be sure you always believed she was our good friend's daughter.'

'What could I believe else? All combined to mislead me. But how was it possible to be so cruel as to tell me nothing just now?' said Alain, lowering his voice, and taking her hand, with an accent of reproach, though it did not seem as if he would be implacable. 'But I have found you though you hid yourself so persistently. At least tell me that you do not regret being at last discovered?'

The look now raised to him was sufficient answer.

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